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JOHNNY LUDLOW

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THIRD SERIES.

JOHNNY LUDLOW

THIRD SERIES.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

"God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."

LONGFELLOW.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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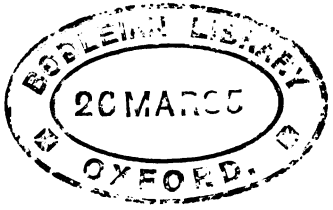
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JOHNNY LUDLOW.

HELEN WHITNEY'S WEDDING.

WHAT WE HEARD.

"WHAT a hot day it is going to be!" cried the Squire, flinging back his thin light coat, and catching the corner of the breakfast cloth with it, so that he upset the salt-cellar. "Yesterday was about the hottest day *I* ever felt, but to-day will be worse."

"And all the jam-making about!" added Mrs. Todhetley.

"You need not go near the jam-making."

"I must to-day. Last year Molly made a mistake in the quantity of sugar: and never could be got to acknowledge it."

"Molly——There's the letter-man," broke off the Squire. "Run, lad."

I went through the open glass doors with all speed. Letters were not every-day events with us. In these fast and busy days a hun-

dred letters are written where one used to be in those. It was one only that the man handed me now.

"That's all this morning, Mr. Johnny."

I put it beside the Squire's plate, telling him it was from Sir John Whitney. There was no mistaking Sir John's handwriting: the popular belief was that he used a skewer.

"From Whitney, is it," cried he. "Where are my spectacles? What's the postmark? Malvern? Oh, then, they are there still."

"Belle Vue Hotel, Malvern.

"DEAR TODHETLEY,—Do take compassion upon a weary man, and come over for a day or two. A whole blessed week this day have I been here with never a friend to speak to, or to make up a rubber in the evening. Featherston's a bad player, as you know, but I wish I had him here. I and my wife might take double dummy, for all the players we can get. Helen is engaged to be married to Captain Foliott, Lord Riverside's nephew; and nobody has any time to think of me and my whist-table. Bring the boys with you: Bill is as moped as I am. We are at the Belle Vue, you see. The girls wanted to stand out for the Foley Arms: it's bigger and grander: but I like a place that I have been used to.

"From your old friend,

"JOHN WHITNEY."

The little Whitneys had caught scarlatina, all the fry of them. Recovered now, they had been sent to a cottage on the estate for change;

and Sir John, his wife, William, Helen, and Anna went for a week to Malvern while the Hall was cleaned. This news, though, of Helen's engagement, took us by surprise.

"How very sudden!" cried the Mater.

Tod was leaning back in his chair, laughing. "I *told* her I knew there was something up between her and that Captain Foliott!"

"Has she known him before?" asked the Mater.

"Known him, yes," cried Tod. "She saw a good deal of him at Cheltenham. As if she would engage herself to anybody after only a week's acquaintanceship!"

"As if Sir John would let her!" put in the Squire. "I can't answer for what Miss Helen would do." And Tod laughed again.

When the children were taken ill, Helen and Anna, though they had had the complaint, were packed off to Sir John's sister, Miss Whitney, who lived at Cheltenham, and they stayed there for some weeks. After that, they came to us at Dyke Manor for three days, and then went with their father and mother to Malvern. Helen was then full of Captain Foliott, and talked of him to us in private from morning till night. She had met him at Cheltenham, and he had paid her no

end of attention. Now, as it appeared, he had followed her to Malvern, and asked for her of Sir John.

"It seems to be a good match—a nephew of Lord Riverside's," observed the Squire. "Is he rich, I wonder ?—and is the girl over head and ears in love with him ?"

"Rich he may be: but in love with him she certainly is not," cried Tod. "She was too ready to talk of him for that."

The remark was amusing, coming from Tod. How had he learnt to be so worldly-wise ?

"Shall you go to Malvern, father ?"

"*Shall I go!*" repeated the Squire, astonished at the superfluous question. "Yes. And start as soon as ever I have finished my breakfast and changed my coat. You two may go also, as you are invited."

We reached Malvern in the afternoon. Sir John and Lady Whitney were alone, in one of the pleasant sitting-rooms of the Belle Vue Hotel, and welcomed us with outstretched hands.

"The girls and William ?" cried Sir John, in answer to inquiries. "Oh, they are out somewhere—with Foliott, I conclude; for I'm sure he sticks to Helen like her shadow.

Congratulate me, you say? Well, I don't know, Todhetley. It's the fashion, of course, to do it; but I'm not sure but we should rather be condoled with. No sooner do our girls grow up and become companionable, and learn not to revoke at whist when they can be tempted into taking a hand, than they want to leave us! Henceforth they must belong to others, not to us; and we, perhaps, see them no oftener than we see any other stranger. It's one of the crosses of life."

Sir John blew his old red nose, so like the Squire's, and my lady rubbed her eyes. Both felt keenly the prospect of parting with Helen.

"But you like him, don't you?" asked the Squire.

"As to liking him," cried Sir John, and I thought there was some hesitation in his tone; "I am not in love with him: I leave that to Helen. We don't all see with our children's eyes. He is well enough, I suppose, as Helen thinks so. But the fellow does not care for whist."

"I think we play too slow a game for him," put in Lady Whitney. "He chanced to say one evening that Lord Riverside is one of the first hands at whist; and I expect Captain

Foliott has been in the habit of playing with him."

"Any way, you are satisfied with the match, as a match, I take it?" observed the Squire.

"I don't say but that I am," said Sir John. "It might be better, of course; and at present their means will not be large. Foliott offers to settle an estate of his, worth about ten thousand pounds, upon Helen; and his allowance from his Uncle Foliott is twelve hundred a year. They will have to get along on that at present."

"And the Captain proposes," added Lady Whitney, "that the three thousand pounds, which will come to Helen when she marries, shall be invested in a house: and we think it would be wise to do it. But he feels quite certain that Mr. Foliott will increase his allowance when he marries; probably double it."

"It's not Lord Riverside, then, who allows him the income?"

"Bless you, Todhetley, no!" spoke Sir John in a hurry. "He says Riverside's as poor as a church mouse, and vegetates from year's end to year's end at his place in Scotland. It is Foliott the mine-owner down in

the North. Stay: which is it, Betsey?—mine-owner, or mill-owner?"

"Mill-owner, I think," said Lady Whitney. "He is wonderfully rich, whichever it is; and Captain Foliott will come into at least a hundred thousand pounds at his death."

Listening to all this as I stood on the balcony, looking at the grand and beautiful panorama stretched out below and beyond, for they were talking at the open window, I dreamily thought what a good thing Helen was going to make of it. Later on, all this was confirmed, and we learnt a few additional particulars.

Mr. Foliott, mill-owner and millionaire, was a very great man in the North; employing thousands of hands. He was a good man, full of benevolence, always doing something or other to benefit his townspeople and his dependents. But his health had been failing of late, and he had now gone to the Cape, a sea-voyage having been advised by his doctors. He had never married, and Captain Foliott was his favourite nephew.

"It's not so bad, after all, is it, Johnny?"

The words were whispered over my shoulder, and I started back to see Helen's radiant face.

She and Anna had come in unheard, by me, and had caught the thread of conversation in the room.

"I call it very good, Helen. I hope he is good too."

"You shall see," she answered. "He is coming up with William."

Her dark brown eyes were sparkling, a fresh healthy colour glowed on her cheeks. Miss Helen Whitney was satisfied with her bridegroom-to-be, and no mistake. She had forgotten all about her incipient liking for poor Slingsby Temple.

"What regiment is Captain Foliott in, Helen?"

"Not in any. He has sold out."

"Sold out!"

"His mother and his uncle made him do it. The detachment was ordered to India, and they would not let him go; would not part with him; begged and prayed of him to sell out. Nothing ever vexed him so much in his life, he says; but what could he do? His mother has only him: and on Mr. Foliott he is dependent for riches."

"Entirely dependent?"

"For *riches*, I said, Johnny. He has himself a small competence. Ten thousand

pounds nearly comprises it. And that is to be settled on me."

A slight bustle in the room, and we both looked round. Bill Whitney was noisily greeting Tod. Some one else had followed Bill through the door.

A rather tall man, with reddish hair and drooping, reddish whiskers, bold handsome features, and a look I did not like in his red-brown eyes. Stepping over the window-sill from the balcony, they introduced me to him, Captain Richard Foliott.

"I have heard much of Johnny Ludlow," said he, holding out his hand with a cordial smile, "and I am glad to know him. I hope we shall soon be better acquainted."

I shook his hand and answered in kind. But I was not drawn to him; not a bit; rather repelled. The eyes were not nice: or the voice, either. It had not a true ring in it. Undeniably handsome he was, and I thought that was the best that could be said.

"Look here: we are going for a stroll," said Sir John; "you young people can come, or not, as you please. But if you go up the hill, remember that we dine at six o'clock. Once you get scampering about up there, you forget the time."

He went out with the Squire. Lady Whitney had a letter to write and sat down to do it; the rest of us stood, some on the balcony, some in the room. Helen, Tod, and Captain Foliott were apparently trying which could talk the fastest.

"Why do you look at me so earnestly?" suddenly demanded the latter.

It was to me he spoke. I laughed, and apologised; saying that his face put me in mind of some other face I had seen, but I could not remember whose. This was true. It was true also that I had been looking at him more fixedly than the strict rules of etiquette might require: but I had not an idea that he was observing me.

"I thought you might be wishing to take my portrait," said the Captain, turning away to whisper to Helen.

"More likely to take your *character*," jestingly struck in Bill, with more zeal than discretion. "Johnny Ludlow sees through everybody; reads faces off like a book."

Captain Foliott wheeled sharply round at the words, and stood before me, his eyes gazing straight into mine.

"Can you read my face?" he asked. "What do you see there?"

"I see that you have been a soldier: your movements tell me that: right-about, face; quick, sharp," answered I, turning the matter off with a jest. Tod opportunely struck in.

"How *could* you quit the army?" he asked with emphasis. "I only wish I had the chance of joining it." Though he knew that he had better not let the Squire hear him say so.

"It was a blow," acknowledged Foliott. "One does meet with raps in this world. But, you see, it was a case of—of the indulgence of my own gratification weighed in the scale against that of my mother: and I let my side go up. My uncle also came down upon me with his arguments and his opposition, and altogether I found myself nowhere. I believe he and she are equally persuaded that nobody ever comes out of India alive."

"Who will take my letter to the post?" called out Lady Whitney. All of us volunteered to do it, and went out together. We met Sir John and the Squire strolling about the village rubbing their red faces, and saying how intensely hot it was.

They left us to regale ourselves at the pastrycook's, and sauntered on towards the dark trees shading that deep descent on which

the hotel windows looked out. We found them sitting on one of the benches there.

"Well, Foliott!" cried Sir John. "You'd not have found it hotter than this in India."

"Not so hot, Sir John. But I like heat."

"How-do-you-do?" struck in a big, portly gentleman, who was sitting on the same bench as the Squire and Sir John, and whose face was even redder than theirs. "Did not expect to meet you here."

Captain Foliott, who was the one addressed, wheeled round to the speaker in that sharp way of his, and was evidently taken by surprise. His manner was cold; never a smile sat on his face as he answered:

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Crane! Are you quite well? Staying at Malvern?"

"For an hour or two. I am passing a few days at Worcester, and my friends there would not let me go on without first bringing me to see Malvern."

The stranger spoke like a gentleman and looked like one, looked like a man of substance also (though Foliott did draw down his lips that same evening and speak of him as "nobody"); and Sir John, in his old-fashioned cordiality, begged of Captain Foliott to introduce his friend. Captain Foliott did it with a

not very ready grace. "Mr. Crane, Sir John Whitney; Mr. Todhetley."

"A beautiful place, this, sirs," cried he.

"Yes, only it's too hot to walk about it to-day," answered they. "Have you been up the hill?'

"No, I can't manage that: but my friends are gone up. Have you heard lately from your uncle, Captain Foliott?" added Mr. Crane.

"Not very lately."

"I hear the outward voyage did him a world of good."

"I believe it did."

As if the questions of the stranger worried him, Captain Foliott strolled away towards the abbey: the two girls, Tod, and William following him. I stayed where I was: not liking the heat much more than the Squire did.

"You know Mr. Foliott of Milltown? observed Sir John to the stranger.

"I know him very well indeed, sir. I am a mill-owner myself in the same place: but not as large a one as he is."

"He is uncommonly rich, we hear."

"Aye, he is. Could buy up pretty well half the world."

"And a good man into the bargain?"

"Downright good. Honest, upright, liberal; a true Christian. He does an immense deal for his fellow-men. Nobody ever asks him to put his hand in his pocket in vain."

"When is he expected home?"

"I am not sure when. That will depend, I expect, upon how he feels. But we hear the outward voyage has quite set him up."

"Captain Foliott often talks of his uncle. He seems to think there's nobody like him."

"He has cause to think it. Yes, I assure you, sirs, few men in the world can come up to George Foliott, the mill-owner, for probity and goodness."

How much more he might have said in Mr. Foliott's praise was cut short by the hasty appearance of two young men, evidently the friends of Mr. Crane. They laughed at the speed they had made down the hill, told him the carriage was ready, and that they ought to start at once to reach Worcester by the dinner hour. So the portly old gentleman wished us good day and departed. Running up the bank, I saw them drive off from the Crown in a handsome two-horse phæton.

It was on the day following this, that matters were finally settled with regard to Helen's

marriage. Captain Foliott made good his wish—which, as it appeared, he had been harping upon ever since the proposal was first made: namely, that they should be married immediately, and not wait for the return of Mr. Foliott to England. Sir John had held out against it, asking where the hurry was. To this Captain Foliott had rejoined by inquiring what they had to wait for, and where was the need of waiting, and the chances were that his uncle would stay away for a year. So at last, Sir John, who was a simple-minded man, and as easily persuaded as a duck is to water, gave in; and the wedding was fixed to take place the next month, September, at Whitney.

We made the most of this, our one entire day at Malvern, for we should disperse the next. The Whitneys to Whitney Hall, the house now being in apple-pie order for them; ourselves back to Dyke Manor; Captain Foliott to get the marriage settlement prepared. Helen's three thousand pounds, all she would have at present, was not to be settled at all, but invested in some snug little house that they would fix upon together after the marriage, so that Captain Foliott's lawyers took the preparation of the

deeds of settlement on themselves, saving trouble to Sir John. Three parts of the day we spent roaming the hill: and I must say Foliott made himself as delightful as sun in harvest, and I told myself that I must have misjudged his eyes in thinking they were not nice ones.

But the next morning we had a shock. How swimmingly the world would go on without such things, I leave those who have experienced them to judge. It came when we were at the breakfast-table, in the shape of a letter to Lady Whitney. The scarlatina—which was supposed to have been cleaned and scrubbed out—had come into the Hall again, and the kitchen-maid was laid up with it.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! Whether Sir John or my lady looked the most helplessly bewildered, might have puzzled a juror to decide. Back to the Hall they could not go; and what was to be done? The Squire, open-handed and open-hearted, pressed them to accompany us and take up their quarters at Dyke Manor; and for a minute or two I thought they would have done it; but somebody, Helen, I think, suggested a furnished house in London, and that was finally decided upon, So to London they would go, hire the

first suitable house that offered, and the marriage would take place there instead of at home. Captain Foliott, coming in after breakfast from his hotel, the Foley Arms, stared at the change of programme.

"I wouldn't go to London," said he, emphatically. "London at this season of the year is the most wretched wilderness on the face of the whole earth. Not a soul in it."

"The more room for us, Foliott," cried Sir John. "What will it matter to us whether the town is empty or full?"

"I would strongly advise you, Sir John, not to go. Lady Whitney will not like it, I am certain. As Mr. Todhetley has been good enough to offer you his hospitality——"

"But, bless my heart," interrupted Sir John in a heat, "you don't suppose, do you, that I could trespass upon an old friend for weeks and weeks—a regular army of us! Were it a matter of a few days, I'd not say nay; but who is to foresee how long it may be before we can get into our own house? You've not a bit of thought, Foliott."

"Why not go to your sister's at Cheltenham, sir?" was all the Captain said to this.

"Because I don't choose to go to my sister's at Cheltenham," retorted Sir John, who could

be as obstinate as the Squire when he liked. "And why should we go to Cheltenham more than to London? Come?"

"I thought it would be less trouble for you, sir. Cheltenham is close at hand."

"And London is not far off. As to its being empty, I say that's so much the better: we shall more readily find a furnished house in it. To London we go to-day."

With Sir John in this resolute mood, there was no more to be said. And the notion became quite agreeable, now that they were growing reconciled to it.

"All things are directed for the best," concluded Lady Whitney in her simple faith. "I hardly see how we should have procured Helen's clothes down at Whitney: there will be no difficulty in London."

"You are right, my dear lady, and I am wrong," conceded Captain Foliott, with a good-natured smile. "To us young men of fashion," he added, the smile deepening to a laugh, "London between August and April is looked upon as a nightmare. But circumstances alter cases; and I see that it will be the best and most convenient place for you."

Drawing Helen aside as he spoke, and taking a small morocco case from his pocket,

he slipped upon her finger his first and parting gift: a magnificent hoop of diamonds.

"I should like you to wear it always, my love," he whispered. "As the pledge of your engagement now; later, as the guard of your wedding ring."

II.

"I shall go up in the smoking-carriage, Johnny."

"Shall you! You'll smell finely of smoke when we get there."

"Not I. I'll give my coat a shake at the end of the journey. By Jove! I shall be left behind, if I don't take care."

Tod was right. The train was already on the move. He dashed into the smoking compartment; the porter closed the doors, and we were off.

Off to London. He and I were going up to Helen Whitney's wedding, to which we had been invited when staying at Malvern some weeks ago. The Squire declined for himself, though Sir John had wanted him also. This was Monday; the wedding was to be on Thursday; and on the Saturday Anna and William were to go back with us to Dyke Manor.

It was September weather, and a glorious

day. Now, as the train steamed away on its windings and turnings, the Malvern Hills would glide into view; and now be lost again. But the beautiful landscape was always to be seen, with its woods and dales and fertile plains; and there was not a cloud in the deep blue sky to obscure the sun.

I had the carriage to myself; and pictured Tod one of a crowd of smokers. At Oxford he came back to the carriage, and got in.

"Had enough smoke, Tod?"

"Just for now, lad," he shortly answered; and began to whistle softly and pull at his whiskers. By which I knew he had something on his mind.

"I say, Johnny, I am in a dilemma," he began abruptly, when we were going on again, bending towards me from the opposite seat till his face nearly touched mine.

"What about? What is it?"

"Look here. When I got into the smoking-carriage it was full, all but one seat, which I took—and that was a corner one, which they had been polite enough to leave. The carriage was dark with smoke: pipes had been going, I expect, all the way from Worcester. I lighted mine, saying nothing, and nobody said anything to me. The man opposite to me and

the one next me had a hot discussion on hand, touching a racehorse; not quarrelling, but talking loudly, so that they made a tolerable noise. At the other end of the carriage sat two men facing one another, just as you and I sit now; and one of them I'll vow was an Oxford man: I could tell him by his cut. They were talking together also, but rather in an undertone. All at once, when we were nearing Oxford, there was a lull at my end, and I heard a bit of what they were saying. The first word that particularly caught my ear was Foliott. 'What plant is Foliott up to now, I wonder?' cried one. 'Don't know,' said the other; 'nothing good, we may be sure of. A rumour reached me that he was going to be married.' 'What a chance for the girl!' cried the first. 'Poor thing! But it may not be true,' he went on, knocking the ashes out of his pipe: 'who would marry such a scamp as that?' Now, Johnny," broke off Tod, "the question is, were they speaking of this Foliott? This man that we are now on our way to see married to Helen?"

"Was that all you heard, Tod?"

"Every word. The train began to slacken speed then for the Oxford station, and the two men stood up to reach their overcoats and hand-

bags, for they got out there. I had half a mind to stop them and ask what Foliott they had been speaking of; but I did not much like to, and while I hesitated they disappeared. They might just have told me to mind my own business if I had spoken; so perhaps it comes to the same."

"Foliott is not an absolutely uncommon name, Tod. There may be plenty of Foliotts about."

"Just so, lad. But, on the other hand, it may be the one we know of, Richard Foliott. One point coincides—he is going to be married."

I sat back on the cushioned seat, revolving probabilities and improbabilities, and thinking of many things. That instinctive dislike I had taken to Captain Foliott's eyes, or to himself, or to both, flashed over me with vivid force. The fine scenery we were just then whirling past, and on which my eyes seemed to be fixed, might have been a sandy desert, for all I saw of it.

"The worst is, the dilemma it puts one in," continued Tod. "To speak of this to the Whitneys, or not to speak?—that's the question. If it should turn out to be another Foliott, they might never forgive me. *He* never would."

"But then—Helen's whole future may be at stake. It may be in peril."

Tod pulled at his whiskers again. I read the name of the station we were flashing past.

"I hate a doubt of this sort," cried Tod impatiently, "where one can't see how one's duty lies. It bothers the mind. I think I'll let it go, Johnny."

"But, if it should turn out when too late, that he is a scamp: and, for the want of a word, you have let him—let him make bones of Helen!"

"What could I say?" he asked irritably. "That I overheard two fellows, in the smoking compartment of a railway train, saying that one Foliott was a scamp. Sir John would naturally ask me what grounds I had for assuming that it was their Foliott. Well, I have no grounds. And how small I should look!"

"There are slight grounds, at any rate, Tod. The name is his, Foliott; and both are going to be married."

"All the same, I don't see that I can speak."

"Put it in this light, Tod," I said. "You don't speak; and they get married; and then something or other bad turns up about Foliott; and Sir John finds out that it was in

your power to warn him in time, and you did not. What will he say then?"

"I'm sure I don't know," grunted Tod. "I wish I could see on which side land lies."

All the rest of the way to London we continued to discuss it by fits and starts, and at last hit upon a good thought—to tell the whole to William Whitney. It was the best thing to do, so far as we could see. It might all end in smoke, or—it might not.

The Whitneys had found a furnished house in Gloucester Place, near Portman Square. The maid who had taken the illness was soon well again, and the Hall was being regularly fumigated now, preparatory to their return. In Gloucester Place they were within a short drive of Miss Deveen's, a fact which had guided them to the locality. Indeed, it was only a walk for the younger of us.

Not until night did we get any chance of a private talk with William. Our bedrooms opened into one another; and after we went up for good, he sat down in our room.

"You won't be affronted, Bill, at something I am about to say?" struck in Tod, by way of prelude.

"Affronted!" cried Bill. "I! What on earth do you ask that stupid question for?"

"In coming up to-day, I heard a few words in the train," went on Tod. "Two fellows were talking, and they brought up a man's name in a disparaging manner. It is a friend of yours, Bill; and Johnny and I had a precious good discussion, I can tell you, as to whether we should repeat it to you or not."

"Was it my name?" asked Bill. "What could they have to say against me?"

"No, no; they'd have got an answer from me had it been yours. First of all, we thought of mentioning it to Sir John; but I did not like to, and that's the truth. So we just concluded to put it before you, as one of ourselves, and you can tell him if you like."

"All right," said Bill. "Go ahead."

Tod told him all from beginning to end. Not that it was very much to tell: but he brought in our own conversation; the delicacy we felt in speaking at all, and the arguments for and against. Bill was not in the least put out; rather wondered, I thought, that we should be.

"It can't be Dick Foliott, you know," said he. "There's not anything against him; impossible that there should be."

"I am glad you say so," cried Tod, relieved.

"It was only for Helen's sake we gave a thought to it."

"The name was the same, you see—Foliott," I put in. "And that man is going to be married as well as this one."

"True," answered Bill, slowly. "Still I feel sure it is quite impossible that it can be Foliott. If—if you think I had better mention it, I will. I'll mention it to himself."

"I should," said I eagerly, for somehow my doubts of the man were growing larger. "Better be on the safe side. You don't know much about him, after all, Bill."

"Not know much about him! What do you mean, Johnny? We know enough. He is Riverside's nephew, a very respectable old Scotch peer, and he is Foliott the mill-owner's nephew; and I'm sure *he* is to be respected, if it's only for the money he has made. And Dick has a very fair income of his own, and settles ten thousand pounds upon Helen, and will come into a hundred thousand by-and-by, or more. What would you have?"

I could not say what I would have; but the uneasiness lay on my mind. Tod spoke.

"The men alluded to conduct, I expect, Bill; not to means. They spoke of that Foliott as an out-and-out scamp, and called the girl

he was going to marry 'Poor thing,' in a piteous tone. You'd not like that applied to Helen."

"By Jove, no. Better be on the safe side, as Johnny says. We'll say nothing to my father at present; but you and I, Tod, will quietly repeat to Foliott what you heard, and we'll put it to him, as man to man, to tell us in all honour whether the words could have related to himself. Of course the idea is altogether absurd; we will tell him that, and beg his pardon."

So that was resolved upon. And a great relief it was. To decide upon a course of action, in any unpleasant difficulty, takes away half its discomfort.

Captain Foliott had come to London but once since they met at Malvern. His stay was short; three days; and during those days he was so busy that Gloucester Place only saw him in the evenings. He had a great deal to do down in the North against his marriage, arranging his property preparatory to settling it on Helen, and seeing to other business matters. But the zeal he lacked in personal attention, he made up by letter. Helen had one every morning as regularly as the post came in.

He was expected in town on the morrow, Tuesday: indeed, Helen had thought he might perhaps have come to-day. Twelve o'clock on Wednesday, at Gloucester Place, was the hour fixed for signing the deeds of settlement: and by twelve o'clock on Thursday, the following day, all going well, he and Helen would be man and wife.

Amidst the letters waiting on the breakfast-table on Tuesday morning was one for Helen. Its red seal and crest told whence it came.

"Foliott always seals his letters to Helen," announced Bill for our information. "And what ill news has that one inside it?" continued he to his sister. "You look as cross as two sticks, Nelly."

"Just mind your own business," said Helen.

"What time will Captain Foliott be here to-day, my dear?" questioned her mother.

"He will not be here at all to-day," answered Helen, fractiously. "It's too bad. He says it is impossible for him to get away by any train, in time to see us to-night; but he will be here the first thing in the morning. His mother is worse, and he is anxious about her. People always fall ill at the wrong time."

"Is Mrs. Foliott coming up to the wedding?" I asked.

"No," said Lady Whitney. "I of course invited her, and she accepted the invitation; but a week ago she wrote me word she was not well enough to come. And now, children, what shall we set about first? Oh, dear! there is such a great deal to do and to think of to-day!"

But we had another arrival that day, if we had not Captain Foliott. That was Mary Seabright, who was to act as bridesmaid with Anna. Brides did not have a string of maids in those days, as some have in these. Leaving them to get through their multiplicity of work —which must be connected, Bill thought, with bonnets and wedding-cake—we went up with Sir John in a boat to Richmond.

That evening we all dined at Miss Deveen's. It was to be one of the quietest of weddings; partly by Captain Foliott's express wish, chiefly because they were not at home at the Hall. Miss Deveen and Miss Cattledon were to be the only guests besides ourselves and Mary Seabright, and a Major White who would go to the church with Foliott. Just twelve of us, all told.

"But where's the bridegroom?" asked Miss Deveen, when we reached her house.

"He can't get up until late to-night;

perhaps not until to-morrow morning," pouted Helen.

The dinner-table was a downright merry one, and we did not seem to miss Captain Foliott. Afterwards, when Sir John had made up his whist-table—with my lady, Miss Deveen, and the grey-haired curate, Mr. Lake, who had dropped in—we amused ourselves with music and games in the other room.

"What do you think of the bridegroom-to-be, Johnny Ludlow?" suddenly demanded Miss Cattledon, who had sat down by me. "I hear you saw him at Malvern."

"Think of him! Oh, he—he is a very fine man; good-looking, and all that."

"That I have seen for myself," retorted Cattledon, pinching her hands round her thin waist. "When he was staying in London, two or three weeks ago, we spent an evening in Gloucester Place. Do you *like* him?"

She put the "like" so very pointedly, staring into my face at the time, that I was rather taken aback. I did *not* like Captain Foliott: but there was no particular necessity for telling her so.

"I like him—pretty well, Miss Cattledon."

"Well, I do not, Johnny Ludlow. I fancy he has a temper; I'm sure he is not good-

natured; and I—I don't think he'll make a very good husband."

"That will be a pity. Helen is fond of him."

Miss Cattledon coughed significantly. "Is she? Helen is fond of him in-so-far as that she is eager to be married—all girls are—and the match with Captain Foliott is an advantageous one. But if you think she cares for him in any other way, Johnny Ludlow, you are quite mistaken. Helen Whitney is no more in love with Captain Foliott than you are in love with me."

At which I laughed.

"Very few girls marry for love," she went on. "They fall in love, generally speaking, with the wrong person."

"Then what do they marry for?"

"For the sake of being married. With the fear of old maidism staring them in the face, they are ready, silly things, to snap at almost any offer they receive. Go up to Helen Whitney now, tell her she is destined to live in single blessedness, and she would be ready to fret herself into a fever. Every girl would not be, mind you: but there are girls and girls."

Well, perhaps Miss Cattledon was uot far wrong. I did not think as she did then, and

laughed again in answer: but I have learned more of the world and its ways since.

In every corner of the house went Helen's eyes when we got back to Gloucester Place, but they could not see Captain Foliott. She had been hoping against hope.

II.

Wednesday. Young women, bringing in huge band-boxes, were perpetually ringing at the door, and by and by we were treated to a sight of the finery. Enough gowns and bonnets to set up a shop were spread out in Helen's room. The wedding-dress lay on the bed: a glistening white silk, with a veil and wreath beside it. Near to it was the dress she would go away in to Dover, the first halting-stage on their trip to Paris: a quiet shot-silk, Lady Whitney called it, blue one way, pink another. Shot, or not shot, it was uncommonly pretty. Straw bonnets were the mode in those days, and Helen's perched above her travelling-dress, had white ribbons on it and a white veil—which was the mode for brides also. I am sure Helen, in her vanity, thought more of the things than of the bridegroom.

But she thought of him also. Especially when the morning went on and did not bring

him. Twelve o'clock struck, and Sir John Whitney's solicitor, Mr. Hill, who had come up on purpose, was punctual to his appointment. Sir John had thought it right that his own solicitor should be present at the reading and signing of the settlements, to see that they were drawn up properly.

So there they sat in the back parlour, which had been converted into a business room for the occasion, waiting for Captain Foliott and the deeds with what patience they had. At one o'clock, when they came in to luncheon, Sir John was looking a little blue; and he remarked that Captain Foliott, however busy he might have been, should have stretched a point to get off in time. Appointments, especially important ones, were appointments, and ought to be kept.

For it was conclusively thought that the delay was caused by the Captain's having been unable to leave the previous day, and that he was travelling up now.

So Mr. Hill waited, and Sir John waited, and the rest of us waited, Helen especially; and thus the afternoon passed in waiting. Helen was more fidgety than a hen with one chick: darting to the window each instant, peeping down the staircase at the sound of every ring.

Dinner-time; and no appearance of Captain Foliott. After dinner; and still the same. Mary Seabright, a merry girl, told Helen that her lover was like the knight in the old ballad —he loved and he rode away. There was a good deal of laughing, and somebody called for the song, "The Mistletoe Bough." Of course it was all in jest: as each minute passed, we expected the next would bring Captain Foliott.

Not until ten o'clock did Mr. Hill leave, with the understanding that he should return the next morning at the same hour. The servants were beginning to lay the breakfast-table in the dining-room, for a lot of sweet dishes had been brought in from the pastry-cook's, and Lady Whitney thought they had better be put on the table at once. In the afternoon we had tied the cards together— "Mr. and Mrs. Richard Foliott"—with white satin ribbon, sealed them up in their envelopes with white wax, and directed them ready for the post on the morrow.

At twelve o'clock a move was made to go upstairs to bed; and until that hour we had still been expecting Captain Foliott.

"I feel positive some dreadful accident has happened," whispered Helen to me as she

said good night, her usually bright colour faded to paleness. "If I thought it was carelessness that is causing the delay, as they are cruelly saying, I—I should never forgive him."

"Wait a minute," said Bill to me aside, touching Tod also. "Let them go on."

"Are you not coming, William?" said Lady Whitney.

"In two minutes, mother."

"I don't like this," began Bill, speaking to us both over our bed-candles, for the other lights were out. "I'll be hanged if I think he means to turn up at all!"

"But why should he not?"

"Who is to know? Why has he not turned up already? I can tell you that it seems to me uncommonly strange. Half a dozen times to-night I had a great mind to call my father out and tell him about what you heard in the train, Tod. It is so extraordinary for a man, coming up to his wedding, not to appear: especially when he is bringing the settlements with him."

Neither of us spoke. What, indeed, could we say to so unpleasant a topic? Bill went on again.

"If he were a man in business, as his uncle old Foliott, is, I could readily understand that

interests connected with it might detain him till the last moment. But he is not; he has not an earthly thing to do."

"Perhaps his lawyers are in fault," cried Tod. "If they are backward with the deeds of settlement ——"

"The deeds were ready a week ago. Foliott said so in writing to my father."

A silence ensued, rendering the street noises more audible. Suddenly there came a sound of a horse and cab dashing along, and it pulled up at our door. Foliott, of course.

Down we went, helter-skelter, out on the pavement. The servants, busy in the dining-room still, came running to the steps. A gentleman, getting out of the cab with a portmanteau, stared, first at us, then at the house.

"This is not right," said he to the driver, after looking about him. "It's next door but one."

"This is the number you told me, sir."

"Ah, yes. Made a mistake."

But so sure did it seem to us that this late and hurried traveller, must be, at least, some one connected with Captain Foliott, if not himself, that it was only when he and his luggage had disappeared within the next house but one, and the door was shut, and

the cab gone away, that we realised the disappointment, and the vague feeling of discomfort it left behind. The servants went in. We strolled to the opposite side of the street, unconsciously hoping that luck might bring another cab with the right man in it.

"Look there!" whispered Bill, pointing upwards.

The room over the drawing-room was Lady Whitney's; the room above that, the girls'. Leaning out at the window, gazing now up the street, now down, was Helen, her eyes restless, her face pale and woe-begone in the bright moonlight.

It was a sad night for Helen Whitney. She did not attempt to undress, as we knew later, but kept her post at that weary window. Every cab or carriage that rattled into view was watched by her with eager, feverish anxiety. But not one halted at the house, not one contained Captain Foliott. Helen Whitney will never forget that unhappy night of tumultuous feeling and its intolerable suspense.

But here was the wedding-morning come, and no bridegroom. The confectioners were rushing in with more dishes, and the dressmakers appearing to put the finishing touches

to Helen. Lady Whitney was just off her head: doubtful whether to order all the paraphernalia away, or whether Captain Foliott might not come yet. In the midst of the confusion a little gentleman arrived at the house and asked for Sir John. Sir John and he had a long conference, shut in alone: and when they at length came out Sir John's nose was of a dark purple. The visitor was George Foliott, the mill-owner: returned since some few days from the Cape.

And the tale he unfolded would have struck dismay to the nose of many a wiser man than was poor Sir John. The scamp spoken of in the train was Richard Foliott; and a nice scamp he turned out to be. Upon Mr. Foliott's return to Milltown the prospective wedding had come to his ears, with all the villany encompassing it; he had at once taken means to prevent Mr. Richard's carrying it out, and had now come up to enlighten Sir John Whitney.

Richard Foliott had been a scamp at heart from his boyhood; but he had contrived to keep well before the world. Over and over again had Mr. Foliott paid his debts and set him on his legs again. Captain Foliott had told the Whitneys that he quitted the army by

the wish of his friends: he quitted it because he dared not stay in it. Before Mr. Foliott departed for the Cape he had thrown Richard off; had been obliged to do it. His fond foolish mother had reduced herself to poverty for him. The estate, once worth ten thousand pounds, which he had made a pretence of settling upon Helen, belonged to his mother, and was mortgaged about a dozen deep. He dared not go much abroad for fear of arrest, especially in London. This, and a great deal more, was disclosed by Mr. Foliott to Sir John; who sat and gasped, and rubbed his face, and wished his old friend Todhetley was at hand, and thanked God for Helen's escape.

"He will never be any better," affirmed Mr. Foliott, "be very sure of that. He is innately bad, and the pain he has inflicted upon me for years has made me old before my time. But—forgive me, Sir John, for saying so—I cannot think you exercised discretion in accepting him so easily for your daughter."

"I had no suspicion, you see," returned poor Sir John. "How could I have any? Being your nephew, and Lord Riverside's nephew——"

"Riverside's nephew he called himself, did he! The old man is ninety, as I daresay you know, and never stirs from his home in the extreme north of Scotland. Some twenty years ago, he fell in with the sister of Richard's mother (she was a governess in a family up there), and married her; but she died within the year. That's how he comes to be Lord Riverside's 'nephew.' But they have never met in their lives."

"Oh, dear!" bemoaned Sir John. "What a villain! and what a blessed escape! He made a great point of Helen's bit of money, three thousand pounds, not being tied up before the marriage. I suppose he wanted to get it into his own hands."

"Of course he did."

"And to pay his debts with it; as far as it would go."

"*Pay his debts with it!*" exclaimed Mr. Foliott. "Why, my good sir, it would take thirty thousand to pay them. He would just have squandered it away in Paris, at his gaming-tables, and what not; and then have asked you to keep him. Miss Whitney is well quit of him: and I'm thankful I came back in time to save her."

Great news to disclose to Helen! Deeply

mortifying to have ordered a wedding-breakfast and wedding things in general when there was no wedding to be celebrated ! The tears were running down Lady Whitney's homely cheeks, as Miss Deveen drove up.

Mr. Foliott asked to see Helen. All he said to her we never knew—but there's no doubt he was as kind as a father.

" He is a wicked, despicable man," sobbed Helen.

" He is all that, and more," assented Mr. Foliott. " You may be thankful your whole life long for having escaped him. And, my dear, if it will at all help you to bear the smart, I may tell you that you are not the first young lady by two or three he has served, or tried to serve, in precisely the same way. And to one of them he behaved more wickedly than I care to repeat to you."

" But," ruefully answered poor Helen, quietly sobbing, " I don't suppose it came so near with any of them as the very morning."

And that was the end of Helen Whitney's wedding.

HELEN'S CURATE.

LATER ON.

A SUMMONS from Mr. Brandon meant a summons. And I don't think I should have dared to disobey one any more than I should those other summonses issued by the law courts. He was my guardian, and he let me know it.

But I was hardly pleased that the mandate should have come for me just this one particular day. We were at Crabb Cot: Helen, Anna, and William Whitney had come to it for a week's visit; and I did not care to lose a day with them. It had to be lost, however. Mr. Brandon had ordered me to be with him as early as possible in the morning: so that I must be off betimes to catch the first train.

It was a cold bleak day towards the end of February: sleet falling now and then, the east wind blowing like mad, and cutting me in two

as I stood at the hall door. Nobody else was down yet, and I had swallowed my breakfast standing.

Shutting the door after me, and making a rush down the walk between the evergreens for the gate, I ran against Lee, the Timberdale postman, who was coming in, with the letters, on his shaky legs. His face, shaded by its grey locks, straggling and scanty, had a queer kind of fear upon it.

"Mr. Johnny, I'm thankful to meet you; I was thinking what luck it would be if I could," said he, trembling. "Perhaps you will stand my friend, sir. Look here."

Of the two letters he handed to me, one was addressed to Mrs. Todhetley; the other to Helen Whitney. And this last had its envelope pretty nearly burnt off. The letter inside could be opened by anybody, and some of the scorched writing lay exposed.

"If the young lady would only forgive me—and hush it up, Mr. Johnny!" he pleaded, his poor worn face taking a piteous hue. "The Miss Whitneys are both very nice and kind young ladies; and perhaps she will."

"How was it done, Lee?"

"Well, sir, I was lighting my pipe. It is a smart journey here, all the way from Timber-

dale—and I had to take the long round to-day instead of the Ravine, because there was a newspaper for the Stone House. The east wind was blowing right through me, Mr. Johnny; and I thought if I had a bit of a smoke I might get along better. A spark must have fallen on the letter while I was lighting my pipe, and I did not see it till the letter was aflame in my hand. If—if you could but stand my friend, sir, and—and perhaps give the letter to the young lady yourself, so that the Squire does not see it—and ask her to forgive me."

One could only pity him, poor worn man. Lee had had pecks of trouble, and it had told upon him, making him old before his time. Now and then, when it was a bad winter's morning, and the Squire caught sight of him, he would tell him to go into the kitchen and get a cup of hot coffee. Taking the two letters from him to do what I could, I carried them indoors.

Putting Helen's with its tindered cover into an envelope, I wrote a line in pencil, and slipped it in also. "Dear Helen,—Poor old Lee has had a mishap and burnt your letter in lighting his pipe. He wants you to forgive it and not to tell the Squire. No real damage is done, so please be kind.—J. L." Directing

this to her, I sent it to her room by Hannah, and made a final start for the train.

And this was what happened afterwards.

Hannah took the letter to Helen, who was in the last stage of dressing, just putting the finishing touches to her hair. Staring at the state her letter was in, she read the few words I had written, and then went into a passion at what Lee had done. Helen Whitney was as good-hearted a girl as ever lived, but hot and hasty in temper, saying anything that came uppermost when put out. She, by the help of time, had got over the smart left by the summary collapse of her marriage, and had ceased to abuse Mr. Richard Foliott. All that was now a thing of the past. And, not having had a spark of love for him, he was the more easily forgotten.

"The wicked old sinner!" she burst out: and with emphasis so startling, that Anna, reading by the window, dropped her prayer-book.

"Helen! What is the matter?"

"*That's* the matter," flashed Helen, showing the half-burnt envelope and scorched letter, and flinging on the table the piece of paper I had slipped inside. Anna took the letter up and read it.

"Poor old man! It was only an accident, Helen; and, I suppose, as Johnny says, no real damage is done. You must not say anything about it."

"Must I not!" was Helen's tart retort.

"Who is the letter from?"

"Never you mind."

"But is it from home?"

"It is from Mr. Leafchild, if you must know."

"Oh," said Anna, shortly. For that a flirtation, or something of the kind, had been going on between Helen and the curate, Leafchild, and that it would not be likely to find favour at Whitney Hall, she was quite aware of.

"Mr. Leafchild writes about the school," added Helen, after reading the letter; perhaps tendering the information as an apology for its having come at all. "Those two impudent girls, Kate and Judith Dill, have been setting Miss Barn at defiance, and creating no end of insubordination."

With the last word, she was leaving the room; the letter in her pocket, the burnt envelope in her hand. Anna stopped her.

"You are not going to show that, are you, Helen? Please don't."

"Mr. Todhetley ought to see it—and call

Lee to account for his carelessness. Why, he might have altogether burnt the letter!"

"Yes, of course it was careless. But I daresay it will be a lesson to him. He is very poor and old, Helen. Pray don't tell the Squire; he might make so much commotion over it, and then you would be sorry. Johnny asks you not."

Helen knitted her brow, but put the envelope into her pocket with the letter; not conceding with at all a good grace, and went down nodding her head in semi-defiance. The cream of the sting lay no doubt in the fact that the letter was Mr. Leafchild's, and that other eyes than her own might have seen it.

She did not say anything at the breakfast-table, though Anna sat upon thorns lest she should: Helen was so apt to speak upon impulse. The Squire talked of riding out; Whitney said he would go with him: Tod seemed undecided what he should do. Mrs. Todhetley read to them the contents of her letter—which was from Mary Blair.

"I shall go for a walk," announced Helen, when the rest had dispersed. "Come and get your things on, Anna."

"But I don't care to go out," said Anna.

"It is a very disagreeable day. And I meant to help Mrs. Todhetley with the frock she is making for Lena."

"You can help her when you come back. I am not going through that Crabb Ravine by myself.".

"Through Crabb Ravine!"

"Yes. I want to go to Timberdale."

It never occurred to Anna that the errand to Timberdale could have any connection with the morning's mishap. She put her things on without more ado—Helen always domineered over her, just as Tod did over me —and the two girls went out together.

"Halloa!" cried Tod, who was standing by the pigeon-house. "Where are you off to?"

"Timberdale," replied Helen. And Tod turned and walked with them.

They were well through the Ravine, and close on to the entrance of Timberdale, before Helen said a word of what she had in her mind. Pulling the burnt envelope and the letter out then, she showed them to Tod.

"What do you think of that for a piece of carelessness?" she asked: and forthwith told him the whole story. Tod, hasty and impulsive, took the matter up as warmly as she had done.

"Lee ought to be reported for this—and punished. There might have been a bank-note in the letter."

"Of course there might," assented Helen. "And for Johnny Ludlow to want to excuse him, and ask me to hush it up!"

"Just like Johnny! In such things he is an out-and-out muff. How would the world go on, I wonder, if Johnny ruled it? You ought to have shown it to the Squire at once, Helen."

"So I should but for Johnny and Anna. As they had asked me not to, I did not quite like to fly in their faces. But I am going to show it to your postmaster at Timberdale."

"Oh, Helen!" involuntarily breathed Anna. And Tod looked up.

"Don't mind her," said Helen. "She and Johnny are just alike—making excuses for everybody. Rymer the chemist is postmaster, is he not?"

"Rymer's dead—don't you remember that, Helen? Before he died, he gave up the post-office business. Salmon, the grocer opposite, took to it."

This Salmon was brother to the Salmon (grocer and draper) at South Crabb. Both

were long-headed men, and flourishing tradesmen in their small way.

"Poor old Lee!" cried Tod, with a shade of pity. "He is too ailing and feeble; we have often said it. But of course he must be taught not to set fire to the letters."

Anna's eyelashes were wet. "Suppose, by your complaining, you should get him turned out of his post?" she suggested, with the timid deference she might have observed to a duke—but in the presence of those two she always lost her courage. Tod answered her gently. When he was gentle to anybody, it was to her.

"No fear of that, Anna. Salmon will blow old Lee up, and there'll be an end of it. Whose letter was it, Helen?"

"It was from Mr. Leafchild—about our schools," answered Helen, turning her face away that he might not see its sudden rush of colour.

Well, they made their complaint to Salmon; who was properly indignant and said he would look into it, Tod putting in a word for the offender, Lee. "We don't want him reported to head-quarters, or anything of that kind, you know, Salmon. Just give him a reprimand, and warn him to be cautious in future."

"I'll see to him, sir," nodded Salmon.

(The final result of the burning of this letter of Helen Whitney's, and of another person's letter that got burnt later, was recorded in the last Series, in a paper called "Lee the Letter-Man."

It may be as well to remind the reader that these stories told by "Johnny Ludlow" are not always placed in consecutive order as regards the time of their occurrence, but go backwards or forwards indiscriminately.)

Being so near, Helen and Anna thought they would call on Herbert Tanerton and Grace at the rectory; next, they just looked in at Timberdale Court—Robert Ashton's. Altogether, what with one delay and another, they arrived at home when lunch was nearly over. And who should be sitting there, but Sir John Whitney! He had come over unexpectedly to pass an hour or two.

Helen Whitney was very clever in her way: but she was apt to be forgetful at times, as all the rest of us are. One thing she had totally and entirely forgotten to-day—and that was to ask Tod not to speak of the letter. So that when the Squire assailed them with reproaches for being late, Tod, unconscious that he was doing wrong, blurted out the truth. A letter from

Mr. Leafchild to Helen had been partly burnt by old Lee, and they had been to Timberdale to complain to Salmon.

"A letter from Leafchild to Helen!" cried out Sir John. "That must be a mistake. Leafchild would not presume to write to Helen."

She grew white as snow. Sir John had turned from the table to face her, and she dared not run away. The Squire was staring and frowning at the news of old Lee's sin, denouncing him hotly, and demanding to see the letter.

"Yes, where is this letter?" asked Sir John. "Let me see it, Helen."

"It—it was about the schools, papa."

"About the schools! Like his impudence! What have you to do with the schools? Give me the letter."

"My gracious me, burn a letter!" cried the Squire. "Lee must be in his dotage. The letter, my dear, the letter; we must see it."

Between them both, Helen was in a corner. She might have been capable of telling a white fib and saying she had not the letter, rather than let her father see it. Anna, who knew she had it in her pocket, went for no-

body; but Tod knew it also. Tod suspecting no complications, was holding out his hand for her to produce it. With trembling lips, and fingers that shook in terror, she slowly drew it forth. Sir John took the letter from her, the Squire caught hold of the burnt envelope.

There was not a friendly hole in the floor for Helen to drop through. She escaped by the door to hide herself and her hot cheeks. For this was neither more nor less than a love-letter from the curate, and Sir John had taken it to the window to read it in the stronger light.

"Bless my heart and mind!" cried he when he had mastered its contents, just such an exclamation as the Squire would have made. "He—he—I believe the fellow means to make love to her! What a false-hearted parson he must be! Come here, Todhetley."

To see the two old heads poring over the letter together through their spectacles was something good, Tod said, when he told me all this later. It was just a love letter and nothing less, but without a word of love in it. But not a bad love letter of its kind; rather a sensible one. After telling Helen about the tracasserie in the parish school (which

must have afforded him just the excuse for writing that he may have wanted), the curate went on to say a little bit about their mutual "friendship," and finished up by begging Helen to allow him to speak to Sir John and Lady Whitney, for he could not bear to think that by keeping silent they were deceiving them. "As honourable a letter in its way as you could wish to hear read," observed Tod; for Sir John and the Squire had read it aloud between them for the benefit of the dining-room.

"This comes of having grown-up daughters," bewailed poor Sir John. "Leafchild ought to be put in the pillory.—And where's Helen got to? Where is that audacious girl?"

Poor Helen caught it hot and strong—Sir John demanding of her, for one thing, whether she had not had enough of encouraging disreputable young sparks with that Richard Foliott. Poor Helen sobbed and hid her head, and finally took courage to say that Mr. Leafchild was a saint on earth—not to be as much as named in the same sentence with Richard Foliott. And when I got home at night, everybody, from Helen downwards, was in the dumps, and Sir John had gone home to make mincemeat of the curate.

Buttermead was one of those straggling

parishes that are often found in rural districts. Whitney Hall was situated in it, also the small village of Whitney, also that famous school of ours, Dr. Frost's, and there was a sprinkling of other good houses. Some farm homesteads lay scattered about; and the village boasted of a street and a half.

The incumbent of Buttermead, or Whitney, was the Rev. Matthew Singleton; his present curate was Charles Leafchild. Mr. Leafchild, though eight-and-twenty years of age, was only now ordained deacon, and this year was his first in the ministry. At eighteen he had gone out to the West Indies, a post having been found for him there. He did not go by choice. Being a steady-minded young fellow, religiously inclined, he had always wished to be a parson; but his father, Dr. Leafchild, a great light among church dignitaries, and Canon residentiary of a cathedral in the North, had set his face against the wish. The eldest son was a clergyman, and of his preferment Dr. Leafchild could take tolerable care, but he did not know that he could do much in that way for his younger sons, and so Charles's hopes had to go to the wall. Spiritual earnestness, however, at length made itself heard within him to some purpose; and he

resolved, come what might, that he would quit money-making for piety. The West Indian climate did not agree with him; he had to leave it for home, and then it was that he made the change. "You would have been rich in time had you stuck to your post," remonstrated the Reverend Doctor to him: "now you may be nothing but a curate all your life." "True, father," was the answer, "but I shall hope to do my duty as one." So Charles Leafchild made himself into a parson, and here he was at Buttermead, reading through his first year, partially tabooed by his family, and especially by that flourishing divine, the head of it.

He was a good-looking young man, as men go. Rather tall than not, with a pale, calm face, brown hair that he wore long, and mild brown eyes that had no end of earnestness in their depths. A more self-denying man could not be found; though as a rule young men are not famous for great self-denial. The small stipend given by Mr. Singleton had to suffice for all his wants. Leafchild had never said what this stipend was; except that he admitted one day it was not *more* than seventy pounds: how much less than that, he did not state.

Just a few roods out of the village stood a small dwelling called Marigold Cottage. A tidy woman named Bean lived in it with her two daughters, one of whom was the paid mistress of the national girls'-school. Mr. Leafchild lodged here, as the late curate had before him, occupying the spare sitting-room and bed-room. And if Mrs. Bean was to be believed—and she had been a veracious woman all her life—three days out of the seven, at least, Mr. Leafchild went without meat at his dinner, having given it away to some sick or poor creature, who wanted it, he considered, more than he did. A self-denying, earnest, gentle-minded man; that's what he was: and perhaps it may be forgiven to Helen Whitney that she fell in love with him.

When Helen went home from London, carrying with her the mortification that came of her interrupted marriage and Captain Foliott's delinquency, she began to do what she had never done in her life before, busy herself a little in the parish: perhaps as a safety-valve to carry off her superfluous anger. The curate was a middle-aged man with a middle-aged wife and two babies, and Helen had no scruple in going about with him, here, there, and everywhere.

To the schools, to the church, to practise the boys, to visit the poor, went she. But when in a few months that curate's heart was made glad by a living—two hundred a year and a five-roomed vicarage—and Mr. Leafchild came in his place, it was a little different. She did not run about with the new curate as she had with the old, but she did see a good deal of him, and he of her. The result was they fell in love with one another. For the first time in her life the uncertain god, Cupid, had pierced the somewhat invulnerable heart of Helen Whitney.

But now, could anything be so inappropriate, or look more hopeless? Charles Leafchild, B.A., curate of Buttermead, positively only yet reading for his full title, scantily paid, no prospect of anything better, lacking patronage; and Miss Helen Whitney, daughter of Sir John Whitney, baronet! Looking at it from a practical point of view, it seemed that he might just as well have expected to woo and wed one of the stars in the sky.

On the bleak February morning that followed Helen's expedition to Timberdale, Mr. Leafchild came down from his chamber and entered his sitting-room. The fire, a small

one, for Mrs. Bean had received a general caution to be sparing of his coal, burnt brightly in the grate. He stood over it for a minute or two, rubbing his slender hands at the blaze: since he left the West Indies he had felt the cold more keenly than formerly. Then he turned to the breakfast-table, and saw upon it, a small portion of cold neck of mutton, an uncut loaf, and a pat of butter. His tea stood there, already made.

"If I leave the meat, it will do for dinner," he thought: and proceeded to make his meal of bread and butter. Letty Bean, who cheifly waited on him, came in.

"A letter for you, sir," she said, handing him a note.

He took it, looked at the handwriting, which was thick and sprawly and not familiar to him, and laid it beside his plate.

"Sir John Whitney's footman brought it, sir," continued Letty, volunteering the information: and a hot colour flushed the curate's face as he heard it. He opened it then. Short and peremptory, it merely requested the Reverend Charles Leafchild to call upon Sir John Whitney that morning at Whitney Hall.

"Is the man waiting for an answer, Letty?"

"No, sir. He went away as soon as he gave it me."

Mr. Leafchild half suspected what had occurred—that Sir John must, in some way, have become acquainted with the state of affairs. He judged so by the cold, haughty tone of the note: hitherto Sir John had always shown himself friendly. Far from being put out, Mr. Leafchild hoped it was so, and went on with his breakfast.

Another interruption. Mrs. Bean this time. She wore a mob cap and had lost her teeth.

"Here's that tipsy Jones come to the door, sir. He says you told him to come."

"Ah yes, I did; let him come in," said the curate. "Is he tipsy this morning?"

"No, sir, only shaky.—And what shall I order you for dinner, sir, to-day? I may as well ask, as I am here."

"That will do," he answered, pointing to the cold meat. "And please mash the potatoes."

Jones came in. The man was not an incorrigibly bad doer, but weak and irresolute. If he worked two days, he idled and drank three, and his wife and children suffered. Mr. Leafchild, who felt more sorrow for him than anger, invited him to a seat by the fire, and

talked to him long and persuasively, almost as one brother might talk to another, and gave him a hot cup of tea. Jones went away great in promises and penitence: and about eleven o'clock the curate betook himself to the Hall.

Of all men living, the Squire perhaps excepted, Sir John was about the worst to carry out any troublesome negotiation. He was good-hearted, irresolute, and quick-tempered.

When Mr. Leafchild was shown in, Sir John utterly forgot certain speeches he had conned over in his mind, broke down, went into a passion, and told the curate he was a designing, impudent villain.

Though his love for Helen, and that was intense, caused him to feel somewhat agitated in the presence of Helen's father, Mr. Leafchild's manner was quiet and calm, a very contrast to that of Sir John. After a little while, when the baronet had talked himself cool, Mr. Leafchild entered into a history of the affair: telling how he and Miss Whitney had met without any intention of any kind, except of that which might be connected with the parish interests, and how with as little intention, a mutual liking—nay, a *love*—had sprung up.

"Yes, that's all very fine," said Sir John, shuffling about his steel spectacles that were perched on his old red nose. "You knew she was my daughter; you knew well what you were about."

The young man reddened at the reproach.

"Sir, indeed you misjudge me. I never thought of such a thing as falling in love with Miss Whitney until the love had come. Had she been the most obscure of young women, it would have been all the same."

"Then you are an idiot for your pains," retorted Sir John. "Why, goodness gracious me! have you not *one* single atom of common sense? Can't you see how unfit it is?"

"My family is a very good one; in point of fact, as good as yours, Sir John—if you will pardon me for saying so thus pointedly," urged the curate in his gentle voice. "And though——"

"Oh, bother?" interrupted Sir John, having no argument particularly confuting at hand. "That goes for nothing. What are your prospects?"

"They are not great. Perhaps I ought to say that I have no prospects as yet. But, sir——"

"Now come! that's honest. No prospects!

And yet you must go making love to my daughter."

"I have not done that, sir, in one sense—'made love.' Hardly a word, I think, has passed between myself and Miss Whitney that you might not have heard. But we have, notwithstanding, been fully aware of the state of each other's heart——"

"The state of each other's fiddlestick," spluttered Sir John. "A nice pair of you, I must say! And pray, what did you think it would come to?"

"What Miss Whitney may have thought I have not presumed to ask. For myself, I confess I am cherishing hopes for the future. It is some little time now since I have been wishing to speak to you, Sir John: and I intended, if you were so kind as not to entirely reject me, to write to my father, Dr. Leafchild, and lay the whole case before him. I think he can help me later if he will; and I certainly believe he will be only too glad to do it."

"Help you to what?"

"To a living."

"And, bless my heart and mind, how long do you suppose you might have to wait? A dozen years. Twenty years, for all you know.

The curate who was here before you, poor Bell, had been waiting more than twenty years for one. It came to him last year, and he was forty-seven years old."

Mr. Leafchild could say nothing to this.

"And a fine living it is, now he has it!" went on Sir John. "No, no, sir: Helen Whitney cannot be dragged nto that kind of fate."

"I should be the last to drag her, or wish to drag her into it. Believe that, Sir John. But, if I had a good living given to me, then I should like her to share it. And I think that my father would perhaps allow me some private means also, for Helen's sake. He has money, and could do it."

"But all those fancies and notions are just so many vapours, clouds up in the sky, and no better, don't you see! You young men are sanguine and foolish; you lose sight of facts in fallacies. We must look at what is, not at what might be. Why, you are not yet even a priest!"

"No. I shall be ordained to that in a few months' time."

"And then, I suppose, you will either remain here, or get a curacy elsewhere. And your income will be that of a curate's stipend

—a hundred pounds a year, all told. Some curates get but fifty."

"True. We are poorly paid."

"And that may go on till you are forty or fifty years of age! And yet, in the face of it, you ask me to let you have my daughter. Now, Mr. Leafchild, you are either a simpleton yourself, or you must think I am one," added Sir John, rising to end the interview, which had been to him one of thorough discomfort. "And I'm sure I hope you'll pick up a little common sense, young man, and I shall order Miss Helen to pick some up too. There, that's all."

"I trust you are not angry with me, sir," said the curate mildly, for Sir John was holding out his hand to be shaken.

"Well, yes, I am. Anything like this causes one such worry, you know. I'm sure I and my wife have had no sleep all night. You must not think any more of Helen. And now good morning."

As Mr. Leafchild walked back to his lodgings at Dame Bean's, his hopes seemed to be about as dull as the wintry sky on which his nice brown eyes were fixed. His whole happiness, socially speaking, lay in Helen; hers lay with him; but only separation seemed to

looming in the air. Suddenly, when he was close to Marigold Cottage, a little rift broke in the leaden clouds, and a bit of pale blue sky shone forth.

"I will take that as an omen for good; pray God it may be so!" spoke the curate gladly and reverently, as he lifted his hat. "And—come what may, in storm and in tempest, God is over all."

Helen went home in the dumps and to sundry edifying lectures. An embargo was laid on her parish work, and she only saw the curate at church. One month, two months passed over thus, and she grew pale and thin. Sir John was cross, Lady Whitney uncomfortable; they were both simple-minded people, caring more for their children's happiness than for their grandeur. The former told the Squire in confidence that if the young fellow could get a decent living, he was not sure but he'd give in, and that he liked him ten thousand times better than he had ever liked that Foliott.

They met one day by accident. Helen was out moping in the long broad walk; which was beginning to be shady now, for May was all but in, and the trees were putting on their foliage. At the end of it she came to a stand-

still, leaning on the gate. The waters of the lake, out yonder, were blue as the unruffled sky. With a faint cry, she started aside, for Charles Leafchild stood before her.

Being a parson, and tacitly on honour to Sir John, he might have been expected to pass on his way without stopping; but Helen's hand was already stretched out over the gate. He could but shake it.

"You are not looking well," he said after a moment's silence. "I am sorry to see it."

What with his unexpected presence, and what with her mind's general discomfort, Helen burst out crying. Mr. Leafchild kept her hand in his.

"I have a bad headache to-day," said Helen, by way of excuse for her tears. "It has been gloomy weather lately."

"Gloomy within and without," he assented, giving a meaning to her words that she had not meant to imply. "But in every cloud, you know, however dark it may be, there is always a silver lining."

"We can't always see it," returned Helen, drying her tears.

"No; we very often cannot. But we may trust that it is there—and be patient."

"I think it sometimes happens that we

never see it—that all is gloomy to the end, the end of life. What then?"

"Then we may be sure that it is best for us it should be so. God directs all things."

Helen sighed: she had not learnt the love and faith and submission that made up the sum of Mr. Leafchild's life, bringing into it so strange a peace.

"Is it true that you are going to leave?" she asked. "We heard it mentioned."

"Yes: when I shall be fully ordained. Mr. Singleton has to take his nephew. It was an old promise—that he should come to him for his first year, just as I have. I think I shall go to Worcester."

"To Worcester?"

"I have been offered a curacy there by one of the minor canons whose living is in the town, and I feel inclined to take it. The parish is large and has a good many of the very poor in it."

Helen made a face. "But would you like that? You might be frightfully overworked."

"It is what I should like. As to the work —it is done for our Master."

He shook hands with her again, and left, the cheery smile still on his face, the thought-

ful light in his steadfast eyes. And never a word of love, you see, had passed.

It was, I take it, about a fortnight after this, that there went walking one afternoon to Whitney Hall, a tall, portly, defiant-looking gentleman in gold-rimmed spectacles and a laced-up clerical hat. By the way he turned his head here and there, and threw his shoulders about as he strode along, you might have taken him for a bishop at least, instead of a canon—but canons in those days were a great deal more self-important than bishops are in these. It was the Rev. Dr. Leafchild. A real canon was he, a great man in his own cathedral, and growing rich on his share of its substantial revenues: your honorary canons with their empty title and non-stipends had not sprung into fashion then. In his pompous manner, and he had been born pompous, Dr. Leafchild asked to see Sir John Whitney.

After Mr. Leafchild's interview with Sir John in February, he had written to his father and told him all about it, asking him whether he thought he could not help him later to a living, so that he might have a chance of winning Helen. But for Helen's being a baronet's daughter and the connection one

that even the canon might be proud of, he would have turned a deaf ear: as it was, he listened. But Dr. Leafchild never did things in a hurry; and after some correspondence with his son (and a great deal of grumbling, meant for his good), he had now come into Worcestershire for the purpose of talking over the affair with Sir John.

The upshot was, that Sir John gave in, and sanctioned the engagement. There was an excellent living somewhere down in the North —£800 a year, a handsome house, and some land—the next presentation to which the canon could command. He had intended it for his eldest son; but he, by some lucky chance, had just obtained a better preferment, and the Doctor could promise it to Charles. The present incumbent was old and ailing; therefore, in all probability, it would very speedily fall in. The canon added that he might settle on the young people a small sum at their marriage, say a hundred a year, or so; and he also hinted that Charles might stand a chance of better preferment later—say a snug canonry. So Sir John shook hands heartily upon the bargain, invited the canon to stay dinner, and sent for Charles.

For the next six weeks who so happy as the

curate and Helen? They came over to us at Dyke Manor (for we had gone back there) for a day or two, and we learnt to like him with our whole hearts. What a good, earnest, warm-natured man he was: and oh, how unselfish!

I remember one evening in particular when they were out together, pacing the field path. Helen had his arm, and he was talking to her in what seemed an uncommonly solemn manner: for his hand was lifted now and then in earnestness, and both were gazing upwards. It was a beautiful sky: the sun had set in splendour, leaving crimson and gold clouds behind it, the evening star twinkled in the deepening canopy. Mrs. Todhetley sent me to them. A poor woman had come up for broth for her sick son, one of our labourers. She was in great distress: a change had taken place in him for the worse, he was calling for the clergyman to come to him before he died: but Mr. Holland was out that evening—gone to Evesham.

"Johnny, I—I think Mr. Leafchild would go," said the Mater. "Do you mind asking him?"

Hardly any need to ask. At the first word he was hastening to the woman and walking

away with her. Helen's eyes, gazing at the sky still, were wet with tears.

"Is it not beautiful, Johnny?"

"Very." It was a glorious sunset.

"But I never saw it as I see it now. He is teaching me many things. I cannot hope to be ever as he is, Johnny, not half as good; but I think in time he will make me a little like him."

"You have a happy life before you."

"Yes—I hope so," she said, hesitatingly. "But sometimes a feeling makes itself heard within me—that one who is so entirely fitted for the next world may not long be left in this."

II.

It was autumn weather—October. A lot of us were steaming over to Worcester in the train. Miss Whitney from Cheltenham, and a friend of hers—a maiden lady as ancient as herself, one Miss Conaway, of Devonshire—were staying at the Hall. Miss Conaway did not know Worcester, and was now being taken to see it—especially the Cathedral. Lady Whitney, Helen, Anna, and I made up the party, and we filled the carriage. My being with them arose from chance: I had come over accidentally that morning to

Whitney Hall. Of course Helen hoped to see something besides the cathedral—her curate. For in June Mr. Leafchild, then in priest's orders, entered on his new curacy at Worcester, there to stay until the expected living should fall in.

"How is he?" I asked Helen, bending over the arm of the seat that divided us.

"Working himself to death," she whispered back to me, her tone a cross one.

"He said he was glad there would be plenty of work, you know. And it is a large parish."

"But he need not let it put *everything* else out of his head."

"Meaning you?"

"I have not heard from him for more than a week. Papa had a letter from Dr. Leafchild this morning. He said in it that Charles, when he last wrote, complained of being poorly."

"A great many curates do get sadly overtaxed."

"Oh, and what do you think?" went on Helen. "He is actually beginning to have scruples about taking that living, on the score that there'll be hardly any work to do."

"But—he will take it?"

"Yes, I suppose he *will*, because of me; but it will go against the grain, I fancy. I do think one may have too strict a conscience."

It was past one o'clock when we reached Worcester. Lady Whitney complained in the train of having started too late. First of all there was luncheon to be taken at the Star: that brought it to past two. Then various other things had to be done: see the cathedral, and stay the afternoon service, go over the china works at Diglis, and buy a bundle of articles at the linen-draper's. All these duties over, they meant to invade Mr. Leafchild's lodgings in Paradise Row.

They took the draper's to begin with, the whole of them trooping in, one after another, like sheep into a pen: and I vow that they only came out again when the bell was going for three o'clock service. Helen was not in a genial mood: at this rate there would not be much time left for visiting the curate.

"It was Aunt Ann's fault," she grumbled to me—"and mamma's. They were a good half hour looking at the stuff for the children's winter frocks. Aunt Ann maintained that cashmere was best, mamma held to merino. All the shelves they had taken down! I'd

not be a linen-drapers' shopman for the world."

Just in time, were we, to get into our seats before the procession of clergy and choristers came in. The chanter that afternoon was Mr. Leafchild's rector: I knew him to speak to. But there's no space to linger upon details.

A small knot of people, ourselves and others, had collected in the transept after service, waiting for one of the old bedesmen to do the honours of the cathedral, when the chanter came down the steps of the south aisle, after disrobing in the vestry.

"Do you know who he is?" I said to Helen, who was standing with me a little apart.

"No—how should I know? Except that he must be one of the minor canons."

"He is Mr. Leafchild's rector."

"Is he!" she eagerly cried, the colour coming into her face. And just then he chanced to look our way, and nodded to me. I went up to him to speak.

"This is a terrible thing about Leafchild," he exclaimed in a minute or two.

"What is it?" I asked, my breath collapsing.

Helen, who had slowly paced after me on

the white flags, stood stock still and turned as pale as you please.

"Have you not heard of his illness? Perhaps not, though: it has been so sudden. A few days ago he was apparently as well as I am now. But it was only last night that the doctors began to apprehend danger."

"Is it fever?"

"Yes. A species of typhoid, I believe. Whether caught in his ministrations or not, I don't know. Though I suppose it must have been. He is lying at his lodgings in Paradise Row. Leafchild has not seemed in good condition lately," continued the clergyman. "He is most unremitting in his work, fags himself from morning till night, and lives anyhow: so perhaps he was not fortified to resist the attack of an enemy. He is very ill: and since last night he has been unconscious."

"He is *dangerously* ill, did you say?" spoke poor Helen, biting her lips to hide their tremor.

"Almost more than dangerous: I fear there is little hope left," he answered, never of course suspecting who Helen was. "Good afternoon."

She followed him with her eyes as he turned to the cloister door: and then moved away

towards the north entrance, looking as one dazed.

"Helen, where are you going?"

"To see him."

"Oh, but it won't do. It won't, indeed, Helen."

"*I am going to see him,*" she answered, in her most wilful tone. "Don't you hear that he is dying? I know he is; I feel it instinctively as a sure and certain fact. If you have a spark of goodness you'll come with me, Johnny Ludlow. It's all the same—whether you do or not."

I looked around for our party. They had disappeared up the other aisle under convoy of the bedesman, leaving Helen and myself to follow at our leisure; or perhaps not noticing our absence. Helen, marching away with quick steps, passed out at the grand entrance.

"It is not *safe* for you to go, Helen," I remonstrated, as we went round the graveyard and so up High Street. "You would catch the fever from him."

"*I* shall catch no fever."

"He caught it."

"I wish you'd be quiet. Can't you *see* what I am suffering?"

The sweetest sight to me just then would

have been Lady Whitney, or anybody else holding authority over Helen. I seemed responsible for any ill that might ensue: and yet, what could I do?

"Helen, pray listen to a word of reason! See the position you put me in. A fever is not a light thing to risk."

"I don't believe that typhoid fever is catching. He did not say typhus."

"Of course it's catching."

"Are you afraid of it?"

"I don't know that I am afraid. But I should not run into it by choice. And I'm sure you ought not to."

We were just then passing that large and handsome druggist's shop that the Squire always called Featherstonhaugh's—just because Mr. Featherstonhaugh once kept it. Helen darted across the street and into it.

"A pound of camphor," said she, to the young man behind the right-hand counter.

"A pound of camphor!" he echoed. "Did you say *a pound*, ma'am?"

"Is it too much?" asked Helen. "I want some to put about me: I am going to see some one who is ill."

It ended in his giving her two ounces. As we left the shop she handed part of it to me,

stowing the rest about herself. And whether it was thanks to the camphor, I don't know, but neither of us took any harm.

"There. You can't grumble now, Johnny Ludlow."

Paradise Row, as everybody knows, is right at the other end of the town, past the Tything. We had nearly reached the house when a gentleman, who looked like a doctor, came out of it.

"I beg your pardon," said Helen, accosting him as he met us, and coughing to hide her agitation, "but we think—seeing you come out of the house—that you may be attending Mr. Leafchild. Is he better?"

The doctor looked at us both, and shook his head as he answered:

"Better in one sense of the word, in so far as that he is now conscious; worse in another. He is sinking fast."

A tremor shook Helen from head to foot. She turned away to hide it. I spoke.

"Do you mean—dying?"

"I fear so."

"Are his friends with him?"

"Not any of them. His father was sent to yesterday, but he has not yet come. We did not write before, not having anticipated danger."

"Why don't they have Henry Carden to him; cried Helen in passionate agitation as the doctor walked away. "*He* could have cured him."

"No, no, Helen; don't think that. Other men are just as clever as Henry Carden. They have only one treatment for fever."

A servant girl answered the door, and asked us into the parlour. She took us for the relations from the North. Mr. Leafchild was lying in a room near—a comfortable bedchamber. Three doctors were attending him, she said; but just now the nurse was alone with him. Would we like to go in, she added: we had been expected all day.

"Come with me, Johnny," whispered Helen.

He was lying in bed, white and still, his eyes wide open. The nurse, a stout old woman in light print gown and full white apron, stood at a round table in the corner, noiselessly washing a wine-glass. She turned her head, curtsied, and bustled out of the room.

But wasn't he weak, as his poor thin hands clasped Helen's! His voice was hollow as he tried to speak to her. The bitter tears, running down her cheeks, were dropping on to the bed-clothes.

"You should not have come," he managed to say. "My love, my love!"

"Is there no hope?" she sobbed. "Oh, Charles, is there *no* hope?"

"May God soothe it to you! May He keep you always in His good keeping!"

And is it no trouble for you to die?" she went on, reproach in her anguished tone. "Have you no regret for the world, and—and for those you leave behind?"

"It is God's will," he breathed. "To myself it is no trouble, for He has mercifully taken the trouble from me. I regret you, my Helen, I regret the world. Or, rather, I should regret it, but that I know I am going to one brighter and better. You will come to me there, my dear one, and we shall live together for ever."

Helen knelt down by the bed; he was lying close on the edge of it; and laid her wet face against his. He held her to him for a moment, kissed her fervently, and then motioned to me to take her away.

"For your own sake, my dear," he whispered. "You are in danger here. Give my dear love to them all."

Helen just flicked her hand back at me, as much as to say, Don't *you* interfere. But at

that moment the fat old nurse bustled in again, with the announcement that two of the doctors and Mr. Leafchild's rector were crossing the road. That aroused Helen.

One minute's close embrace, her tears bedewing his dying cheeks, one lingering hand-clasp of pain, and they parted. Parted for all time. But not for eternity.

"God be with you ever!" he breathed, giving her his solemn blessing. "Farewell, dear Johnny Ludlow!"

"I am so sorry! If you could but get well!" I cried, my eyes not much dryer than Helen's.

"I shall soon be well; soon," he answered with a sweet faint smile, his feeble clasp releasing my hand, which he had taken. "But not here. Fare you well."

Helen hid herself in a turn of the passage till the doctors had gone in, and then we walked down the street together, she sobbing softly. Just opposite Salt Lane, a fly passed at a gallop. Dr. Leafchild sat in it muffled in coats, a cloud of sorrow on his generally pompous face.

And that was the abrupt end of poor Charles Leafchild, for he died at midnight,

full of peace. God's ways are not as our ways; or we might feel tempted to ask why so good and useful a servant should have been taken.

And so, you perceive, there was another marriage of Helen Whitney frustrated Fortune seemed to be against her.

MR. JELLICO.

JELLICO'S PACK.

THE shop was not at all in a good part of Evesham. The street was narrow and dirty, the shop the same. Over the door might be seen written "Tobias Jellico, Linen-draper and Huckster." One Monday—which is market day at Evesham, as the world knows—in going past it with Tod and little Hugh, the child trod on his bootlace and broke it, and we turned in to get another. It was a stuffy shop, filled with bundles as well as wares, and behind the counter stood Mr. Jellico himself, a good-looking, dark man of forty, with deep-set blue eyes, that seemed to meet at the nose, so close were they together.

The lace was a penny, he said, and Tod laid down sixpence. Jellico handed the sixpence to a younger man who was serving lower down, and began showing us all kinds of articles—neckties, handkerchiefs, fishing-

lines, cigar-lights, for he seemed to deal in varieties. Hugh had put in his bootlace, but we could not get away.

"I tell you we don't want anything of this," said Tod, in his haughty way, for the persistency of the fellow had tired him out. "Give me my change."

The other man brought the change wrapped up in paper, and we went on to the inn. Tod had ordered the pony to be put in the chaise, and it stood ready in the yard. Just then a white-haired, feeble old man came into the yard, and begged. Tod opened the paper of half-pence.

"The miserable cheat," he called out. "If you'll believe me, Johnny, that fellow has only given me fourpence in change. If I had time I'd go back to him. Sam, do you know anything of one Jellico, who keeps a fancy shop?" asked he of the ostler.

"A fancy shop, sir?" echoed Sam, considering.

"Sells calico and lucifer matches."

"Oh, I know Mr. Jellico!" broke forth Sam, his recollection coming to him. "He has got a cousin with him, sir."

"No doubt. It was the cousin that cheated me. Mistakes are mistakes, and the best of

us are liable to them; but if that was a mistake, I'll eat the lot."

"It's as much of a leaving-shop as a draper's, sir. Leastways, it's said that women can take things in and borrow money on them."

"Oh!" said Tod. "Borrow a shilling on a Dutch oven to-day, and pay two shillings to-morrow to get it out."

"Anyway, Mr. Jellico does a fine trade, for he gives credit," concluded Sam.

But the wrong change might have been a mistake.

In driving home, Tod pulled up at George Reed's cottage. Everybody must remember hearing where that was, and of Reed's being put into prison by Major Parrifer. "Get down, Johnny," said he, "and see if Reed's there. He must have left work."

I went up the path where Reed's children were playing, and opened the cottage door. Mrs. Reed and two neighbours stood holding out something that looked like a gown-piece. With a start and a grab, Mrs. Reed caught the stuff, and hid it under her apron, and the two others looked round at me with scared faces.

"Reed here? No, sir," she answered, in a sort of flurry. "He had to go over to

Alcester after work. I don't expect him home much afore ten to-night."

I shut the door, thinking nothing. Reed was a handy man at many things, and Tod wanted him to help make some alteration in the pheasantry at the Manor. It was Tod who had set it up—a long, narrow place enclosed with green trellised work, and some gold and silver pheasants running about in it. The Squire had been against it at first, and told Tod he'd not have workmen bothering about the place. So Tod got Reed to come in of an evening after his day's work, and in a fortnight the thing was up. Now he wanted him again to alter it: he had found out it was too narrow. That was one of Tod's failings. If he took a thing into his head it must be done off-hand. The Squire railed at him for his hot-headed impatience: but in point of fact he was of just the same impatient turn himself. Tod had been over to Bill Whitney's and found their pheasantry was twice as wide as his.

"Confound Alcester," cried Tod in his vexation, as he drove on home. "If Reed could have come up now and seen what it is I want done, he might have begun upon it to-morrow evening."

"The Pater says it is quite wide enough as it is, Tod."

"You shut up, Johnny. If I pay Reed out of my own pocket, it's nothing to anybody."

On Tuesday he sent me to Reed's again. It was a nice spring afternoon, but I'm not sure that I thanked him for giving me the walk. Especially when upon lifting the latch of the cottage door, I found it fastened. Down I sat on the low bench outside the open window to wait—where Cathy had sat many a time in the days gone by, making believe to nurse the children, and that foolish young Parrifer would be leaning against the pear-tree on the other side the path. I had to leave my message with Mrs. Reed; I supposed she had only stepped into a neighbour's, and might be back directly, for the two little girls were playing at "shop" in the garden.

Buzz, buzz: hum, hum. Why, those voices were in the kitchen! The lower part of the casement was level with the top of my head; I turned round and stretched up my eyes to look.

Well! surprises, it is said, are the lot of man. It *was* his face, unless my sight deceived itself. The same blue eyes, that were in the shop at Evesham the day before, were inside

Mrs. Reed's kitchen now: Mr. Tobias Jellico's. The place seemed to be crowded with women. He was smiling and talking to them in the most persuasive manner imaginable, his hands waving an accompaniment, on one of which glittered a ring with a yellow stone in it, a persuasive look on his rather well-featured face.

They were a great deal too agreeably engrossed to see me, and I looked on at leisure. A sort of pack, open, rested on the floor; the table was covered with all kinds of things for women's dress; silks, cottons, ribbons, mantles; which Mrs. Reed and the others were leaning over and fingering.

"Silks ain't for the like of us; I'd never have the cheek to put one on," cried a voice that I knew at once for shrill Peggy Dickon's. Next to her stood Ann Dovey, the blacksmith's wife; who was very pretty, and vain accordingly.

"What kind o' stuff d'ye call this, master?" Ann Dovey asked.

"That's called laine," answered Jellico. "It's all pure wool."

"It's a'most as shiny as silk. I say, Mrs. Reed, d'ye think this 'ud wear?"

"It would wear for ever," put in Jellico.

"Ten yards of it would make as good a gown as ever went on a lady's back; and the cost is but two shillings a yard."

"Two shillings! Let's see—what 'ud that come to? Why, twenty, wouldn't it? My patience, I shouldn't never dare to run up that score for one gownd."

Jellico laughed pleasantly. "You take it, Mrs. Dovey. It just suits your bright cheeks. Pay me when you can, and how you can: sixpence a week, or a shilling a week, or two shillings, as you can make it easy. It's like getting a gown for nothing."

"So it is," cried Ann Dovey, in a glow of delight. And by the voice, Mr. Jellico no doubt knew that she had as good as yielded to the temptation. He got out his yard measure.

"Ten yards?" said he.

"I'm a'most afeard. Will you promise, sir, not to bother me for the money faster than I can pay it?"

"You needn't fear no bothering from me; only just keep up the trifle you've got to pay off weekly."

He measured off the necessary length. "You'll want some ribbon to trim it with, won't you?" said he.

"Ribbin—well, I dun know. Dovey might say ribbin were too smart for me."

"Not a bit on't, Ann Dovey," spoke up another woman—and *she* was our carter's wife, Susan Potter. "It wouldn't look nothing without some ribbin. That there narrer grass-green satin 'ud be nice upon 't."

"And that grass-green ribbon's dirt cheap," said Jellico. "You'd get four or five yards of it for a shilling or two. Won't *you* be tempted now?" he added to Susan Potter. She laughed.

"Not with them things. I shouldn't never hear the last on't if Potter found out I went on tick for finery. He's rough, sir, and might beat me. I'd like a check apron, and a yard o' calico."

"Perhaps I might take a apron or two, sir, if you made it easy," said Mrs. Dickon.

"Of course I'll make it easy; and a gown too if you'll have it. Let me cut you off the fellow to this of Mrs. Dovey's."

Peggy Dickon shook her head. "It ain't o' no good asking me, Mr. Jellico. Ann Dovey can buy gownds; she haven't got no children; I've got a bushel on 'em. No; I don't dare. I wish I might! Last year, up at Cookhill Wake, I see a sweet gownd, not

unlike this, what had got green ribbins upon it," added the woman longingly.

Being (I suppose) a kind of Mephistopheles in his line, Mr. Tobias Jellico accomplished his wish and cut off a gown against her judgment. He sold other gowns, and "ribbins," and trumpery; the yard measure had nearly as little rest as the women's tongues. Mrs. Reed's turn to be served seemed to come last; after the manner of her betters, she yielded precedence to her guests.

"Now for me, sir," she said. "You've done a good stroke o' business here to-day, Mr. Jellico, and I hope you won't objec' to change that there gownd piece as I bought last Monday for some'at a trifle stronger. Me and some others have been a looking at it, and we don't think it'll wear."

"Oh I'll change it," readily answered Jellico. "You should put a few more shillings on, Mrs. Reed: better have a good thing when you're about it. It's always cheaper in the end."

"Well, I suppose it is," she said. "But I'm a'most frightened at the score that'll be running up."

"It's easily wiped off," answered the man, pleasantly. "Just a shilling or two weekly."

There was more chaffering and talking; and after that came the chink of money. The women had each a book, and Jellico had his book, and they were compared with his, and made straight. As he came out with the pack on his back, he saw me sitting on the bench, and looked hard at me: whether he knew me again, I can't say.

Just then Frank Stirling ran by, turning down Piefinch Lane. I went after him: the women's tongues inside were working like so many steam-engines, and it was as well to let them run down before speaking to Mrs. Reed.

Halfway down Piefinch Lane on the left, there was a turning, called Piefinch Cut. It had grown into a street. All kinds of shops had been opened, dealing in small wares: and two public houses. A pawnbroker from Alcester had opened a branch establishment here—which had set the world gaping more than they would at a wild-beast show. It was managed by a Mr. Figg. Mr. Figg's three balls stood out in the middle of the Cut; and the blacksmith's forge, to which Stirling was bound, was next door. He wanted something done to a piece of iron. While we were standing amid the sparks, who should go into

the house the other side the way but Jellico and his pack!

"Yes, he should come into mine, he should, that fellow," ironically observed John Dovey: who was a good-natured, dark-eyed little man, with a tolerable share of sense. "I'd be after trundling him out again, feet foremost."

"Is he a travelling hawker?" asked Stirling.

"He's a sight worse sir," answered Dovey. "If you buy wares off a hawker you must pay for 'em at the time: no money, no goods. But this fellow seduces the women to buy his things on tick, he does: Tuesday arter Tuesday he comes prowling into this here Cut, and does a roaring trade. His pack'll walk out o' that house a bit lighter nor it goes in. Stubbs's wife lives over there; Tanken's wife, she lives there; and there be others. If I hadn't learnt that nobody gets no good by interfering a'tween men and their wives, I'd ha' telled Stubbs and Tanken long ago what was going on."

It had been on the tip of my tongue to say where I had just seen Jellico, and the trade he was doing. Remembering in time that Mrs. Dovey had been one of the larger purchasers, I kept the news in. The blacksmith here fell to humming the first verse of a ditty popular in our county amid the rustics. It is

entitled "Mr. Bourne and his Wife," and sets forth the grief a man comes to who ventures on any such interference as that he had hinted at.

"Mr. Bourne and his wife
Went to breakfast in strife
About toast or bread-and-butter with their tea;
Says she, 'I'll rule the roast,
And I'll have a plate of toast;'
So to logger-heads within went they."

"His name's Jellico," Dovey broke off his song to say, as he hammered away at Stirling's iron. "He have got a fine shop somewhere over at Evesham. It's twelve or fifteen months now, Master Johnny, since he took to come here. When first I see him I wondered where the deuce the hawker's round could be, appearing in the Cut so quick and reg'lar; but I soon found he was no reg'lar hawker. Says I to my wife, 'Don't you go and have no dealings with that there pest, for I'll not stand it, and I might be tempted to stop it summary. 'All right, Jack,' says she; 'when I want things I'll deal at the old shop at Alcester.' But there's other wives round about us doing strokes and strokes o' trade with him; 'taint all of 'em, Master Ludlow, as is so sensible as our Ann."

Considering the stroke of trade I had just

seen done by Ann Dovey, it was as well not to hear this. "Mr. Bourne and his wife" was perhaps not a particularly genteel song; but I took up the strain of the second verse, and sat down on a rusty grate.

"There was one Mr. Moore
Lived on the next floor,
A man that was strong in the wrist;
He overheard the clatter
About toast and bread-and-butter,
And he knocked down Mr. Bourne with his fist."

"If he's not a hawker, what is he?" asked Stirling, swaying himself on a beam in the roof; and I'm sure I did not know either.

"It's a cursed system," hotly returned John Dovey; "and I say that afore your faces, young gents. It may do for the towns, if they chooses to have it—that's their business; but it don't do for us. What do our women here want o' fine shawls and gay gownds? — decking theirselves out as if they was so many Jezebels? But 'taint that. Let'em deck, if they've got no sense to see how ill it looks on their sun-freckled faces and hands hard wi' work; it's the ruin it brings.—Just you move on t'other side, Master Ludlow, sir; you be right in the way o' the sparks. There's a iron pot over there as does for sitting on."

"I'm all right, Dovey. Tell us about Jellico."

Jellico's system, to give Dovey's explanation in brief, was this: He brought over a huge pack of goods every Tuesday afternoon in a pony-gig from his shop at Evesham. He put up the pony, and carried the pack on his round, tempting the women right and left to buy. Husbands away at work, and children at school, the field was open. *He asked for no ready money down.* The purchases were entered in a book, to be paid off by weekly instalments. The payments had to be kept up; Jellico saw to that. However short the household had to run of the weekly necessaries, Jellico's money had to be ready for him. It was an awful tax, just as Dovey described it, and drifted into at first by the women without thought of ill. The debt in itself was bad enough; but the fear lest it should come to their husbands' ears was almost worse. As Dovey described all this in his homely, but rather flowery language, it put me in mind of those pleasure-seekers that sail too far over a sunny sea in thoughtlessness, and suspect no danger till their vessel is right upon the breakers.

"There haven't been no blow-ups yet to

speak of," said the blacksmith. "But they be coming. I could just put my finger upon half a dozen women at this blessed minute what's wearing theirselves to shadders with the trouble. They come here to Figg's in the dusk o' evening wi' things hid under their aprons. The longer Jellico lets it go on, the worse it gets, for they *will* be tempted, the she-creatures, buying made flowers for their best bonnets to-day, and ribbuns for their Sunday caps to-morrow. If Jellico lets 'em, that is. He knows pretty sure where he may trust and where he mayn't. 'Taint he as will let his pocket suffer in the long run. He knows another thing—that the further he staves off any big noise the profitabler it'll be for him. Once let that come, and Master Jellico might get hunted out o' the Cut, and his pack and its finery kicked to shreds."

"But why are the women such simpletons, Dovey?" asked Frank Stirling.

"You might as well ask why folks eats and drinks, sir," retorted Dovey, his begrimed eyes lighted with the flame. "A love o' their faces is just born with the women, and it goes with 'em to the grave. Set a parcel o' finery before 'em and the best'll find their eyes a-longing, and their mouths a-watering. It's said

Eve used to do up her hair looking into a clear pool."

"Putting it in that light, Dovey, I wonder all the women here don't go in for Mr. Jellico's temptations."

"Some on 'em has got better sense; and some has got husbands what's up to the thing, and keeps the reins tight in their own hands," complacently answered the unconscious Dovey.

"Up to the thing!" repeated Stirling; "I should think all the men are up to it, if Jellico is here so constantly."

"No, sir, they're not. Most of 'em are at work when he comes. They may know some'at about him, but the women contrives to deceive 'em, and they suspects nothing. The fellow with the pack don't concern them or their folk at home, as they supposes, an' so they never bothers theirselves about him or his doings. I'd like to drop a hint to some of 'em to go home unexpected some Tuesday afternoon; but may be it's best let alone."

Dovey partly hummed, partly sang, the third verse of "Mr. Bourne and his Wife." Stirling brought himself to an anchor on the iron pot, and brandished a bar of pig-iron."

"I'll hazard my life
You shall not beat your wife,
For I'm sure it is a shame and disgrace.'
'You fool,' says Mrs. Bourne,
'It is no business of yourn'—
And she smacked a cup of tea in his face."

"I suppose your wife is one of the sensible ones, Dovey?"——and I kept my countenance as I said it.

"She daredn't be nothing else, Master Johnny. I be a trifle loud if I'm put out. Not she," emphatically added Dovey, his strong, bared arm dealing down a heavy blow on the anvil, and sending up a whole cloud of sparks. "I'd never get put in jail for her, as she knows; I'd shave her hair off first. Run up a score with that there Jellico! No, she'd not be such a idiot as that. You should hear how she goes on again her neighbours that does run it, and the names she calls 'em."

Poor John Dovey! Where ignorance is bliss——.

"Why, if I thought my wife could hoodwink me as some of 'em does their men, I'd never hold up my head of one while, for shame; no, not in my own forge," continued Dovey. "Ann's temper's a bit trying sometimes, and wants keeping in order; but she'd be above deceit o' that paltry sort. She don't

need to act it, neither; I give her a whole ten shillings t'other day, and she went and laid it out at Alcester."

No doubt. Any amount of shillings would soon be sacrificed to Ann's vanity.

"How much longer is that thing going to take, Dovey?" interposed Stirling.

"Just about two minutes, sir. 'Twere a cranky——there he goes."

The break in Dovey's answer was caused by the appearance of Jellico. He came out, shouldering his pack. The blacksmith looked after him down the Cut, and saw him turn in elsewhere.

"I thought 'twas where he was going," said he; "'taint often he passes that there dwelling. Other houses seem to have their days, turn and turn about; but that un gets him constant."

"It's where Bird's wife lives, is it not, Dovey?"

"It's where she lives, fast enough, sir. And Bird, he be safe at his over-looking work, five mile off, without fear of his popping in home to hinder the dealing and chaffering. But she'd better mind—though Bird do get a'most three pound a week, he have got means for every sixpence of it, with his peck o'

childern, six young uns of her'n, and six of his first wife's and none on 'em yet able to earn a penny-piece. If Bird thought she was running up a score with Jellico, he'd give her two black eyes as soon as look at her."

"Bird's wife never seems to have any good clothes at all; she looks as if she'd not a decent gown to her back," said Frank.

"What she buys is mostly things for the little 'uns: shimmys and pinafores, and that," replied Dovey. "Letty Bird's one o' them that's more improvidenter than a body of any sense 'ud believe, Master Stirling; she never has a coin by the Wednesday night, she hasn't. The little uns 'ud be a-rolling naked in the gutter, but for what she gets on tick off Jellico; and Bird, seeing 'em naked, might beat her for that. That don't mend the system; the score's a-being run up, and it'll bring trouble sometime as sure as a gun. Beside that, if there was no Jellico to serve her with his poison, she'd *have* to save enough for decent clothes. Don't you see how the thing works, sir?"

"Oh, I see," carelessly answered Stirling. "D'ye call the pack's wares poison, Dovey?"

"Yes, I do," said Dovey, stoutly, as he handed Frank his iron. "They'll poison the

peace o' many a household in this here Cut. You two young gents just look out else, and see."

We came away with the iron. At the end of Piefinch Lane, Frank Stirling took the road to the Court, and I turned into Reed's. The wife was by herself then, giving the children their early tea.

"Reed shall come up to the Manor as soon as he gets home, sir," she said, in answer to Tod's message.

"I was here before this afternoon, Mrs. Reed, and couldn't get in. You were too busy to hear me at the door."

The knife halted in the bread she was cutting, and she glanced up for a moment; but seemed to think nothing, and finished the slice.

"I've been very busy, Master Ludlow. I'm sorry you've had to come twice, sir."

"Busy enough, I should say, with Jellico's pack emptied on the table, and you and the rest buying up at steam pace."

The words were out of my lips before I saw her startled gesture of caution, pointing to the children: it was plain they were not to know anything about Jellico. She had an honest face, but it turned scarlet.

"Do you think it is a good plan, Mrs. Reed, to get things upon trust, and have to make up money for them weekly?" I could not help saying to her as she came to the door.

"I'm beginning to doubt whether it is, sir."

"If Reed thought he had a debt hanging over him, that might fall at any moment——"

"For the love of mercy, sir, don't say nothing to Reed!" came the startled interruption. "You won't, will you, Master Johnny?"

"Not I. Don't fear. But if I were you, Mrs. Reed, for my own sake I should cut all connection with Jellico. Better deal at a fair shop."

She nodded her head as I went through the gate; but her face had now turned to a sickly whiteness that spoke of terror. Was the woman so deep in the dangerous books already?

Reed came up in the evening, and Tod showed him what he wanted done. As the man was measuring the trellis-work, Hannah happened to pass. She asked him how he was getting on.

"Amongst the middlings," answered Reed, shortly. "I was a bit put out just now."

"What by?" asked Hannah, who said any-

thing she chose before me without the smallest ceremony: and Tod had gone away.

"As I was coming up here, Ingram stops me, and asks if I couldn't let him have the bit of money I owed him. I stared at the man: what money was I likely to owe him——?"

"Ingram, the cow-keeper?" interrupted Hannah.

"Ingram the cow-keeper. So, talking a bit, I found there was a matter of six shillings due to him for the children's milk: it was ever so long since my wife had paid. Back I went to her at once to know the reason why—and it was that made me late in coming up here, Master Johnny."

"I suppose he had sold her skim milk for new, and she thought she'd make him wait for his money," returned Hannah.

"All she said to me was that she didn't think it had been running so long; Ingram had said to me that she always told him she was short of money and couldn't pay," answered Reed. "Anyway, I don't think she'll let it run on again. It put me out, though. I'd rather go off into the workhouse, or die of starvation, than I'd let it be said in the place my wife didn't pay as she went on."

I saw through the difficulty, and should have

liked to give Reed a hint touching Jellico. Failing the practicability of that, I helped Reed at the measurement, and whistled the fourth and last verse of "Mr. Bourne and his Wife," which had been left unfinished at the blacksmith's forge.

"Says poor Mr. Moore,
As he sneaked through the door,
'I'm sure I am a man without brains:
When married folks are carping
And a stranger puts his word in,
He is sure to get a thank for his pains.'"

Now it was rather strange that, all in two days, Jellico and the mischief he was working should be thus brought before me in three or four ways, considering that I had never in my life before heard of the man. But it chanced to be so. I don't want to say anything about the man personally, good or bad; the mischief lay in the system. That Jellico sold his goods at a nice rate for dearness, and used persuasion with the women to buy them, was as plain as the sun at noonday; but in these respects he was no worse than are many other people in trade. He went to the houses in turn, and the women met him; it might be several weeks before the meeting was held at Mrs. Reed's again. Ann Dovey could not enjoy the hospitality

of receiving him at hers, as her husband's work lay at home. But she was a constant visitor to the other places.

And the time went on; and Mr. Jellico's trade flourished. But we heard nothing more about it at Dyke Manor, and I naturally forgot it.

II.

"Just six shillings on it, Mr. Figg! That's all I want to-day, but I can't do without that."

That so well-conducted and tidy a woman as George Reed's wife should be in what the Cut called familiarly the "pawn-shop," would have surprised everybody not in the secret. But she it was. Mr. Figg, a little man with weak eyes and a few scattered locks of light hair, turned over the offered loan with his finger and thumb. A grey gown of some kind of woollen stuff.

"How many times have this here gownd been brought here, Mrs. Reed?" asked he.

"I haven't counted 'em," she sighed. "Why? What's that got to do with it?"

"Cause it's a proof as it must be getting the worse for wear," was the answer, given disparagingly.

"It's just as good as it was the day I had it out o' Jellico's pack," said Mrs. Re

sadly subdued, as of late she had always seemed.

Mr. Figg held up the gown to the light, seeking for the parts in it most likely to be worn. "Look here," said he. "What d'ye call that?"

There was a little fraying certainly in places. Mrs. Reed had eyes and could see it. She did not answer.

"It don't stand to reason as a gownd will wear for ever and show no marks. You puts this here gownd in of a Wednesday morning, or so, and gets it out of a Saturday night to wear Sundays. Wear and tear *is* wear and tear."

Mrs. Reed could not deny the accusation. All the available articles her home contained; that is, the few her husband was not likely to observe the absence of; together with as much of her own wardrobe as she could by any shift do without, were already on a visit to Mr. Figg; which visit, according to present look-out, promised to be a permanent one. This gown was obliged to be taken out periodically. Had she not appeared decent on Sundays, her husband would have demanded the reason why.

"You've gave me six shillings on it before," she argued.

"Can't again. Don't mind lending five; next week it'll be but four. It wasn't never worth more nor ten new," added Mr. Figg loudly, to drown remonstrances.

"Why, I gave Jellico double that for it! Where's the use of you running things down?"

As Jellico was in one sense a friend of Mr. Figg's—for he was certainly the cause of three parts of his pledges being brought to him—the pawnbroker let the question pass. Mrs. Reed went home with her five shillings, her eyes taking quite a wild look of distress and glancing cornerwise on all sides, as if she feared an ambush.

It had not been a favourable year; weather had been bad, strikes were prevalent, money was dear, labour scarce. Men were ready to snatch the work out of each other's hands; some were quite unemployed, others less than they used to be. Of course the homes in Piefinch Cut, and similar small homes not in the Cut, went on short commons. And if the women had been nearly unable to get on before and stave off exposure, anybody may see that that was a feat impracticable now. One of them, Hester Reed, thought the doubt and difficulty and remorse and dread would kill her.

Dread of her husband's discovering the truth, and dread of his being called upon to answer for the debt. Unable to keep up her weekly interest and payments to Mr. Jellico for some time now, the main debt had only accumulated. She owed him two pounds nineteen shillings. And two pounds nineteen shillings to a labourer's wife seems as a wide gulf that can never be bridged over while life shall last. Besides this, she had been obliged to go into debt at the general shop; *that* had added itself up now to eight-and-twenty shillings, and the shop was threatening procedure. There were other little odds and ends of liabilities less urgent, a few shillings in all. To those not acquainted with the simple living of a rural district, this may not sound so very overwhelming: those who are, know what it means, and how awful was the strait to which Mrs. Reed (with other wives) had reduced herself.

She had grown so thin as hardly to be able to keep her clothes upon her. Sleeping and waking, a dead wall crowded with figures, as a huge sum, seemed to be before her eyes. Lately she had taken to dreaming of hanging feet downwards over a precipice, held up only by the grasp of her hands on its edge. Nearly

always she awoke with the horror: and it would seem to her that it was worse to wake up to life and its cares, than to fall on down to death and be at rest from them. Her husband, perceiving that she appeared very ill, told her she had better speak to Dr. Duffham.

Carrying home the five shillings in her hand, Mrs. Reed sat down in her kitchen and wiped her face, damp with pallor. She had begun to ask—not so much what the ending would be, but how soon it would come. With the five shillings in her hand she must find food and necessaries until Saturday night; there was no more credit to be had. And this was only Wednesday morning. With credit stopped and supplies stopped, her husband would naturally make inquiries, and all must come out. Hester Reed wondered whether she should die of the shame—if she had to stay and face it. Three of the shillings must be paid that afternoon to Ingram the milkman; he would not be quiet any longer: and the woman cast her aching eyes round her room, and saw nothing that it was possible to take away and raise money on.

She had the potatoes on the fire when the children ran in, little toddling things,

from school. Some rashers of bacon lay on the table ready to be toasted. Reed, earning pretty good wages, had been accustomed to live well: with careful management he knew they might do so still. Little did he suspect the state things had got into.

"Tatty dere, mov'er," began the eldest, who was extremely backward in speech.

"Tatty dere" meant "Cathy's there": and the mother looked up from the bacon. Cathy Parrifer (though nobody called her by her new name, but Cathy Reed still) stood at the outer gate, in tatters as usual, talking to some man who had a paper in his hand. Mrs. Reed's heart leaped into her mouth: she lived in dread of everything. A stranger approaching the place turned her sick. And now the terror, whose shadow had been so long looming, was come in reality. Catherine came bounding up the garden to tell the tale: the man, standing at the gate, was waiting to see her father come home to dinner to serve him with a summons for the County Court. Mrs. Reed knew at once what it was for: the eight-and-twenty shillings owing at the general shop. Her face grew white as she sunk into a chair.

"Couldn't you get him to leave the paper

with me, Cathy?" she whispered, insane ideas, of getting up the money somehow, floating into her brain.

"He won't," answered Cathy. "He means to give that to father personally, he says, if he stays till night."

Just as many another has felt, in some apparently insurmountable obstacle, that seemed to be turning their hair grey in the little space of time that you can peel an apple, felt Mrs. Reed. Light seemed to be closing, shame and misery and blackness to be opening. Her hands seemed powerless to put the bacon into the Dutch-oven.

But there ensued a respite. A very short one, but still a respite. While the summons-server was loitering outside, Reed came in through the back-garden, having got over the stile in Piefinch Lane. It was not often he chose that way; accident caused him to do it to-day. Mrs. Reed, really not knowing what she did or said, told Cathy there'd be a morsel of dinner for her if she liked to stop and eat it. As Cathy was not in the luck of such offers every day, she remained: and in her good-nature talked and laughed to divert any suspicion.

But the man at the gate began to smell a

rat; perhaps the bacon as well. Dinner-hour almost over, and no George Reed had come home! He suddenly thought of the back entrance, and walked up the front path to see. Paper in hand, he gave a thump at the house door. Reed was about to leave then: and he went down the path by the man's side, opening the paper. Mrs. Reed, more like a ghost than a woman, took a glance through the window.

"I can't face it, Catherine. When I'm gone, you'd better come home here and do what you can for the children. Tell him all; it's of no good trying to hide it any longer."

She took her worn old shawl from a press and put her bonnet on; and then stooped to kiss her children, saying good-bye with a burst of grief.

"But where are you going?" cried the wondering Cathy.

"Anywhere. If I am tempted to do anything desperate, Cathy, tell father not to think too bad of me, as he might if I was living."

She escaped by the back door. Catherine let her go, uncertain what to be at for the best. Her father was striding back to the house up the garden path, and the storm was coming. As a preliminary van-guard, Cathy snatched

up the youngest girl and held her on her lap. The summons-server was calling after Reed, apparently giving some instructions, and that took up another minute or two; but he came in at last.

Cathy told as much of the truth as she dared; her father was too angry for her to venture on all. In his passion he said his wife might go and be hanged. Cathy answered that she had as good as said it was something of that she meant to go and do.

But talking and acting are two things; and when it came to be put to the test, Hester Reed found herself no more capable of entering upon any desperate course than the rest of us are. And, just as I had been brought in accidentally to see the beginning, so was I accidentally brought in at the ending.

We were at home again for the holidays, and I had been over for an afternoon to the Stirlings'. Events in this world happen very strangely. Upon setting out to walk back in the cool of the late summer's evening, I took the way by Dyke Brook instead of either of the two ordinary roads. Why I chose it I did not know then; I do not now; I never shall know. When fairly launched into the fields, I asked myself why on earth I had come that

way, for it was the loneliest to be found in the two counties.

Turning sharp round the dark clump of trees by Dyke Brook (which just there is wide enough for a pond and as deep as one), I came upon somebody in a shabby grey straw bonnet, standing on its brink and looking down into the water.

"Halloa, Mrs. Reed! Is that you?"

Before I forget the woe-stricken face she turned upon me, the start she gave, I must lose memory. Down she sat on the stump of a tree, and burst into sobs.

"What is it?" I asked, standing before her.

"Master Johnny, I've been for hours round it, round and round, wanting the courage to throw myself in; and I haven't done it."

"Just you tell me all about the trouble," I said, from the opposite stump, upon which I took my seat.

And she did tell me. Alone there for so many hours, battling with herself and Death (it's not wrong to say so), my coming seemed to unlock all the gates of reticence, and she disclosed to me what I've written above.

"God knows I never thought to bring it to such a pass as this," she sobbed. "I went into it without any sense of doing harm. One day,

when I happened to be at Miles Dickon's, Jellico came in with his pack, and I was tempted to buy some ribbon. I said he might come and show me his things the next week, and he did, and I bought a gownd and a shawl. I know now how wrong and blind I was: but it seemed so easy, just to pay a shilling or two a week; like having the things for nothing. And from that time it went on; a'most every Tuesday I took some trifle of him, may be a bit o' print for the little ones, or holland for pinafores; and I gave Cathy a cotton gownd, for she hadn't one to her back. I didn't buy as some of 'em did, for the sake of show and bedeckings, but useful things, Master Johnny," she added, sobbing bitterly. "And this has come of it! and I wish I was at rest in that there blessed water."

"Now, Mrs. Reed! Do you suppose you would be at *rest?*"

"Heaven have mercy on me! It's the thought o' the sin, and of what might come after, that makes me hold back from it."

Looking at her, shading her eyes with her hand, her elbow on her lap, and her face one of the saddest for despair I ever saw, I thought of the strange contrasts there are in the world. For the want of about five pounds this

woman was seeking to end her life; some have done as much for five-and-twenty thousand.

"I've not a friend in the whole world that could help me," she said. "But it's not that, Master Johnny; it's the shame on me for having brought things to such a pass. If the Lord would but be pleased to take me, and save me from the sin of lifting a hand against my own life!"

"Look here, Mrs. Reed. As to what you call the shame, I suppose we all have to go in for some sort or another of that kind of thing as we jog along. As you are *not* taken, and don't seem likely to be taken, I should look on that as an intimation that you must live and make the best of things."

"Live! how, sir? I can't never show myself at home. Reed, he'll have to go to jail; the law will put him there. I'd not face the world, sir, knowing it was all for my thoughtless debts."

Could I help her? Ought I to help her? If I went to old Brandon and begged to have five pounds, why old Brandon in the end would give it me, after he had gone on rather hotly for an hour. If I did not help her, and any harm came to her, what should I——"

"You promise me never to think about

pools again, Mrs. Reed, except in the way of eels, and I'll promise to see you through this."

She looked up, more helpless than before. "There ain't nothing to be done for me, Master Johnny. There's the shame, and the talkin' o' the neighbours——"

"Yes, you need mind *that*. Why, the neighbours are all in the same boat!"

"And there's Reed, sir; he'd never forgive me. He'd——"

Of all cries, she interrupted herself with about the worst: something she saw behind me had frightened her. In another moment she had darted to the pond, and Reed was holding her back from it.

"Be thee a born fool?" roared Reed. "Dost think thee'st not done enough harm as it is, but thee must want to cap it by putting thee'self in there? That would mend it, that would!"

She released herself from him, and slipped on the grass, Reed standing between her and the pond. But he seemed to think better of it, and stepped aside.

"Jump in, an' thee likes to," said he, continuing to speak in the familiar home manner. "I once see a woman ducked in the Severn for pocket-picking, at Worcester races, and

she came out all the cooler and better for't."

"I never thought to bring trouble on you or anybody, George," she sobbed. "It seems to have come on and on, like a great monster growing bigger and bigger as you look at him, till I couldn't get away from it."

"Couldn't or wouldn't, which d'ye mean?" retorted Reed. "Why you women were ever created to bother us, bangs me. I hope you'll find you can keep the children when I and a dozen more of us are in jail. 'Twon't be my first visit there."

"Look here, Reed; I've promised to set it right for her. Don't worry over it."

"I'll not accept help from anybody; not even from you, Master Johnny. What she has done she must abide by."

"The bargain's made, Reed; you can't break it if you would. Perhaps a great trouble may come to me some time in my life that I may be glad to be helped out of. Mrs. Reed will get the money to-morrow, only she need not tell the parish where she found it."

"Oh, George, let it be so!" she implored through her tears. "If Master Johnny's good enough to do this, let him. I might save up by little and little to repay him in time.

If you went to jail through me!—I'd rather die!"

"Will you let it be a lesson to you—— and keep out of Jellico's clutches in future?" he asked, sternly.

"It's a lesson that'll last me to the end of my days," she said, with a shiver. "Please God, you let Master Johnny get me out o' this trouble, I'll not fall into another like it."

"Then come along home to the children," said he, his voice softening a little. "And leave that pond and your folly behind you."

I was, of course, obliged to tell the whole to Mr. Brandon and the Squire, and they both pitched into me as fiercely as tongues could pitch. But neither of them was really angry; I saw that. As to the five pounds, I only wish as much relief could be oftener given with as little money.

CAROMEL'S FARM.

NASH CAROMEL.

YOU will be slow to believe what I am about to write, and say it savours of romance instead of reality. Every word of it is true. Here truth was stranger than fiction.

Lying midway between our house, Dyke Manor, and Church Dykely, was a substantial farm belonging to the Caromels. It stood well back from the road a quarter of a mile or so, and was nearly hidden by the trees that surrounded it. An avenue led to the house; which was a rambling, spacious, very old-fashioned building, so full of queer angles inside, nooks and corners and passages, that you might lose your way in them and never find it again. The Caromels were gentlemen by descent; but their means had dwindled with years, so that they had little left besides this property. The last Caromel who died, generally distinguished as "Old Caromel" by

all the parish, left two sons, Miles and Nash. The property was willed to the elder, Miles: but Nash continued to have his home with him. As to the house, it had no particular name, but was familiarly called "Caromel's Farm."

Squire Todhetley had been always intimate with them; more like a brother than anything else. Not but that he was considerably their senior. I think he liked Nash the best: Nash was so yielding and easy. Some said Nash was not very steady in private life, and that his brother, Miles, stern and moral, read him a lecture twice a week. But whether it was so nobody knew; people don't go prying into their neighbours' wardrobes and closets to seek out the holes in their coats.

At the time I am beginning to tell of, old Caromel had been dead about ten years; Nash was now five-and-thirty, Miles forty. Miles had married a lady with a good fortune, which was settled upon herself and her children; the four of them were girls, and there was no son.

At the other end of Church Dykely, ever so far past Chavasse Grange, lived a widow lady named Tinkle. And when the world had quite done wondering whether Nash

Caromel meant to marry (though, indeed, what had he to marry upon?), it was suddenly found out that he wanted Mrs. Tinkle's daughter, Charlotte. The Tinkles were respectable people, but not equal to the Caromels. Mrs. Tinkle and her son farmed a little land, she had also a small private income. The son had married well. Just now he was away; having gone abroad with his wife, whose health was failing.

Charlotte Tinkle was getting on towards thirty. You would not have thought it, to look at her. She had a gentle face, a gentle voice, and a young, slender figure; her light brown hair was always neat; and she possessed one of those inoffensive natures that would like to be at peace with the whole world. It was natural that Mrs. Tinkle should wish her daughter to marry, if a suitable person presented himself—all mothers do, I suppose—but to find it was Nash Caromel took her aback.

"You think it will not do," observed the Squire, when Mrs. Tinkle was enlarging on the grievance to him one day that they met in a two-acre field.

"How can it do?" returned poor Mrs. Tinkle, in a tone between wailing and crying.

"Nash Caromel has nothing to keep her on, sir, and no prospects."

"That's true," said the Pater. "At present he has thoughts of taking a farm."

"But he has no money to stock a farm. And look at that tale, sir, that was talked of—about that Jenny Lake. Other things have been said also."

"Oh, one must not believe all one hears. For myself, I assure you, Mrs. Tinkle, I know no harm of Nash. As to the money to stock a farm, I expect his brother could help him to it, if he chose."

"But, sir, you would surely not advise them to marry upon an uncertainty!"

"I don't advise them to marry at all; understand that, my good lady; I think it would be the height of imprudence. But I can't prevent it."

"Mr. Todhetley," she answered, a tear dropping down her thin cheeks, on which there was a chronic redness, "I am unable to describe to you how much my mind is set against the match: I seem to foresee, by some subtle instinct, that no good would ever come of it; nothing but misery for Charlotte. And she has had so peaceful a home all her life."

"Tell Charlotte she can't have him—if you think so strongly about it."

"She won't listen—at least to any purpose," groaned Mrs. Tinkle. "When I talk to her she says, 'Yes, dear mother; no, dear mother,' in her dutiful way: and the same evening she'll be listening to Nash Caromel's courting words. Her uncle, Ralph Tinkle rode over from Inkberrow to talk to her, for I wrote to him: but it seems to have made no permanent impression on her. What I am afraid of is that Nash Caromel will marry her in spite of us."

"I should like to see my children marry in spite of me!" cried the Squire, giving way to one of his hot fits. "I'd 'marry' them! Nash can't take her against her will, my dear friend: it takes two people, you know, to complete a bargain of that sort. Promise Charlotte to shake her unless she listens to reason. Why should she not listen? She is meek and tractable."

"She always has been. But, once let a girl be enthralled by a sweetheart, there's no answering for her. Duty to parents is often forgotten then."

"If——Why, mercy upon us, there *is* Charlotte!" broke off the Squire, happening to lift his eyes to the stile. "And Nash too."

Yes, there they were: standing on the other side the stile in the cross-way path. "Halloa!" called out Mr. Todhetley.

"I can't stay a moment," answered Nash Caromel, turning his good-looking face to speak: and it cannot be denied it was a good-looking face, or that he was an attractive man. "Miles has sent me to that cattle sale up yonder, and I am full late."

With a smile and a nod, he stepped lightly onwards, his slender supple figure, of middle height, upright as a dart; his fair hair waving in the breeze. Charlotte Tinkle glanced shyly after him, her cheeks blushing like a peony.

"What's this I hear, young lady?—that you and Mr. Nash yonder want to make a match of it, in spite of pastors and masters!" began the Squire. "Is it true?"

Charlotte stood like a goose, making marks on the dusty path with the end of her large grass-green parasol. Parasols were made for use then, not show.

"Nash has nothing, you know," went on the Squire. "No money, no house, no anything. There'd not be common sense in it, Charlotte."

"I tell him so, sir," answered Charlotte, lifting her shy brown eyes for a moment.

"To be sure; that's right. Here's your mother fretting herself into fiddlestrings for fear of—of—I hardly know what."

"Lest you should be tempted to forget your duty to me, Lottie," struck in the mother. "Ah, my dear! you young people little think what trouble and anxiety you bring upon us."

Charlotte Tinkle suddenly burst into tears, to the surprise of her beholders. Drying them up as soon as she could, she spoke with a sigh.

"I hope I shall never bring trouble upon you, mother, never; I'd not do it willingly for the world. But——"

"But what, child?" cried the mother, for Charlotte had come to a standstill.

"I—I am afraid that parents and children see with different eyes—just as though things wore for each a totally opposite aspect," she went on timidly. "The difficulty is how to reconcile that view and this."

"And do you know what my father used to say to me in my young days?" put in the Squire. "'Young folks think old folks fools, but old folks know the young ones to be so.' There was never a truer saying than that, Miss Charlotte."

Miss Charlotte only sighed in answer. The

wind, high that day, was taking her muslin petticoats, and she had some trouble to keep them down. Mrs. Tinkle got over the stile, and the Squire turned back towards home.

A fortnight, or so, had passed by after this, when Church Dykely awoke one morning to an electric shock: Nash Caromel and Charlotte had gone and got married. They did it without the consent of (as the Squire had put it) pastors and masters. Nash had none to consult, for he could not be expected to yield obedience to his brother; and Charlotte had asked Mrs. Tinkle, and Mrs. Tinkle had refused to countenance the ceremony, though she did not actually walk into the church to forbid it.

Taking a three weeks' trip by way of honeymoon, the bride and bridegroom came back to Church Dykely. Caromel's Farm refused to take them in; and Miles Caromel, indignant to a degree, told his brother that "as he had made his bed, so must he lie upon it," which is a very convenient reproach, and often used.

"Nash is worse than a child," grumbled Miles to the Squire, his tones harder than usual, and his manner colder. "He has gone and married this young woman—who is not his equal—and now he has no home to give

her. Did he suppose that we should receive him back here?—and take her in as well? He has acted like an idiot."

"Mrs. Tinkle will not have anything to do with them, I hear," returned the Squire: "and Tinkle, of Inkberrow, is furious."

"Tinkle of Inkberrow's no fool. Being a man of substance, he thinks they may be falling back upon him."

Which was the precise fear that lay upon Miles himself. Meanwhile Nash engaged sumptuous lodgings (if such a word could be justly applied to any rooms at Church Dykely), and drove his wife out daily in the pony gig that was always looked upon as his at Caromel's Farm.

Nash was flush of money now, for he had saved some; but he could not go on living upon it for ever. After sundry interviews with his brother, Miles agreed to hand him over a thousand pounds: not at all too large a sum, considering that Nash had given him his services, such as they were, for a number of years for just his keep as a gentleman and a bonus for pocket money. A thousand pounds would not go far with such a farm as Nash had been used to and would like to take, and he resolved to emigrate to America.

Mrs. Tinkle (the Squire called her simple at times) was nearly wild when she heard of it. It brought her out of her temper with a leap. Condoning the rebellious marriage, she went off to remonstrate with Nash.

"But now, why need you put yourself into this unhappy state?" asked Nash, when he had heard what she had to say. "Dear Mrs. Tinkle, do admit some common sense into your mind. I am not taking Charlotte to the 'other end of the world,' as you put it, but to America. It is only a few days' passage. Outlandish foreigners! Not a bit of it. The people are, so to speak, our own countrymen. Their language is ours; their laws are, I believe, much as ours are."

"You may as well be millions of miles away, practically speaking," bewailed Mrs. Tinkle. "Charlotte will be as much lost to me there as she would be at the North Pole. She is my only daughter, Nash Caromel, she has never been away from me: to part with her will be like parting with life."

"I am very sorry," said poor Nash, who was just a woman when any appeal was made to his feelings. "Live with you? No, that would not do: but, thank you all the same for offering it. Nothing would induce me to spunge upon

you in that way: and, were I capable of it, your son Henry would speedily turn us out when he returned. I must get a home of my own, for Charlotte's sake as well as for mine: and I know I can do that in America. Land, there, may be had for an old song; fortunes are made in no time. The probability is that before half-a-dozen years have gone over our heads, I shall bring you Charlotte home a rich woman, and we shall settle down here for life."

There's no space to pursue the arguments—which lasted for a week or two. But they brought forth no result. Nash might have turned a post sooner than the opinions of Mrs. Tinkle, and she might as well have tried to turn the sun as to stop his emigrating. The parish looked upon it as not at all a bad scheme. Nash might get on well over there if he would put off his besetting sin, indolence, and not allow the Yankees to take him in.

So Nash Caromel and Charlotte his wife set sail for New York; Mrs. Tinkle bitterly resenting the step, and wholly refusing to be reconciled.

II.

About five years went by. Henry Tinkle's wife had died, leaving him a little girl, and he

was back with the child at his mother's: but that has nothing to do with us. A letter came from the travellers now and then, but not often, during the first three years. Nash wrote to Caromel's Farm; Charlotte to the parson's wife, Mrs. Holland, with whom she had been very friendly. But none of the letters gave much information as to personal matters; they were chiefly filled with descriptions of the new country, its manners and customs, and especially its mosquitoes, which at first nearly drove Mrs. Nash Caromel mad. It was gathered that Nash *did not prosper*. They seemed to move about from place to place, making New York a kind of standing point to return to occasionally. For the past two years no letters at all had come, and it was questioned whether poor Nash and his wife had not dropped out of the world.

In the midst of this uncertainty, Miles Caromel, who had been seriously ailing for some months, died. And to Nash, if he were still in existence, lapsed the Caromel property.

Old Mr. Caromel's will had been a curious one. He bequeathed Caromel Farm, with all its belongings, the live stock, the standing ricks, the crops, the furniture, and all else that might be in or upon it, to his son Miles,

and to Miles's eldest son after him. If Miles left no son, then it was to go to Nash (with all that might then be upon it, just as before), and so on to Nash's son. But if neither of them had a son, and Nash died during Miles's lifetime—in short, if there was no male inheritor living, then Miles could dispose of the property as he pleased. As could Nash also under similar circumstances.

The result of this odd will was, that Nash, if alive, came into the farm and all that was upon it. If Nash had, or should have, a son, it must descend to that son; if he had not, the property was his absolutely. But it was not known whether Nash was alive; and, in the uncertainty, Miles made a will conditionally, bequeathing it to his wife and daughters. It was said that the possessing no son had long been a thorn in the shoes of Miles Caromel; that he had prayed for one, summer and winter.

But now, who was to find Nash? How could the executors let him know of his good luck? The Squire, who was one of them, talked of nothing else. A letter was despatched to Nash's agents in New York, Abraham B. Whitter and Co., and no more could be done.

In a shorter time than you would have

supposed possible, Nash arrived at Church Dykely. He chanced to be at these same agents' house in New York, when the letter got there, and he came off at full speed. So the will made by Miles went for nothing.

Nash Caromel was a good bit altered—looked thinner and older: but he was evidently just as easy and persuadable as he used to be: people often wondered whether Nash had ever said No in his whole life. He did not tell us much about himself, only that he had roamed over the world, hither and thither, from country to country, and had been lately for some time in California. Charlotte was at San Francisco. When Nash took ship from thence for New York, she was not well enough to undertake the voyage, and had to stay behind. Mrs. Tinkle, who had had time, and to spare, to get over her anger, went into a way at this last item of news; and she caught up the notion that Charlotte was dead. For which she had no grounds.

Charlotte had no children; had not had any; consequently there was every probability that Caromel's Farm would be Nash's absolutely, to will away as he should please. He found Mrs. Caromel (his brother's widow) and her daughters in it;

they had not bestirred themselves to look out for another residence. Being very well off, Mrs. Caromel having had several substantial windfalls in the shape of legacies from rich uncles and aunts, they professed to be glad that Nash should have the property—whatever they might have privately felt. Nash, out of a good-natured wish not to disturb them too soon, bade them choose their own time for moving, and took up his abode at Nave, the lawyer's.

There are lawyers and lawyers. I am a great deal older now than I was when these events were enacted, and have gained my share of worldly wisdom; and I, Johnny Ludlow, say that there are good and honest lawyers as well as bad and dishonest. My experience has lain more amidst the former class than the latter. Though I have, to my cost, been brought into contact with one or two bad ones in my time; fearful rogues.

One of these was Andrew Nave: who had recently, so to say, come, a stranger, to settle at Church Dykely. His name might have had a "K" prefixed, and been all the better for it. Of fair show outside, indeed rather a good-looking man, he was not fair within. He managed to hold his own in the parish

estimation, as a rule: it was only when some crafty deed or other struggled to the surface that people would say, "What a sharper that man is!"

The family lawyer of the Caromels, Crow, of Evesham, chanced to be ill at this time, and gone away for change of air, and Nave rushed up to greet Nash on his return, and to offer his services. And the fellow was so warm and hearty, so fair-speaking, so much the gentleman, that easy Nash, to whom the man was an entire stranger, and who knew nothing of him, bad or good, clasped the hand held out to him, and promised Knave his patronage forthwith. If I've made a mistake in spelling the name, it can go.

To begin with, Nave took him home. He lived a door or two past Duffham's: a nice house, well kept up in paint. Some five years before, the sleepy old lawyer, Wilkinson, died in that house, and Nave came down from London and took to the concern. Nave thought that he was doing a first-rate stroke of business now by securing Nash Caromel as an inmate, the solicitorship to the Caromel property being worth trying for; though he might not have been so eager to admit Nash had he foreseen all that was to come of it.

Not caring to trouble Mrs. Caromel with his company, Nash accepted Nave's hospitality; but, liking to be independent, he insisted upon paying for it, and mentioned a handsome weekly sum. Nave made a show of resistance—which was all put on, for he was as fond of shillings as he was of pounds—and then gave in. So Nash, feeling free, stayed on at his ease.

When Nave had first come to settle at Church Dykely with his daughter Charlotte, he was taken for a widower. It turned out, however, that there was a Mrs. Nave living somewhere with the rest of the children, she and her husband having agreed to what was called an amicable separation, for their tempers did not agree. This eldest daughter, Charlotte, a gay, dashing girl of two-and-twenty then, was the only creature in the world, it was said, for whom Nave cared.

Mrs. Caromel did not appear to find readily a place to her liking. People are particular when about to purchase a residence. She made repeated apologies to Nash for keeping him out of his home, but he assured her that he was in no hurry to leave his present quarters.

And that was true. For Charlotte Nave was casting her glamour over him. She liked to cast that over men; and tales had gone about respecting her. Nothing very tangible: and perhaps they would not have held water. She was a little, fair, dashing woman, swaying about her flounces as she walked, with a great heap of beautiful hair, bright as gold. Her blue eyes had a way of looking into yours rather too freely, and her voice was soft as a summer's wind. A dangerous companion was Miss Nave.

Well, they fell in love with one another, as was said; she and Nash. Nash forgot his wife, and she her old lovers. Being now on the road to her twenty-eighth year, she had had her share of them. Once she had been mysteriously absent from home for two weeks, and Church Dykely somehow got up the idea that she and one of her lovers (a young gentleman who was reading law with Nave) were taking a fraternal tour together as far as London to see the lions. But it turned out to be a mistake, and nobody laughed at the notion more than Charlotte when she returned. She wished she had been on a tour —and seeing lions, she said, instead of moping away the whole two weeks at her aunt's, who

had a perpetual asthma, and lived in a damp old house at Chelsea.

But that is of the past, and Nash is back again. The weeks went on. Autumn weather came in. Mrs. Caromel found a place to suit her at Kempsey—one of the prettiest of the villages that lie under the wing of Worcester. She bought it; and removed to it with her private goods and chattels. Nash, even now, made no haste to quit the lawyer's house for his own. Some said it was he who could not tear himself away from Charlotte; others said Miss Charlotte would not let him go; that she held him fast by a silken cord. Anyhow, they were always together, out of doors and in; she seemed to like to parade their friendship before the world, as some girls like to lead about a pet monkey. Perhaps Nash first took to her from her name being the same as his wife's.

One day in September, Nash walked over to the Manor and had a long talk in private with the Squire. He wanted to borrow twelve hundred pounds. No ready money had come to him from his brother, and it was not a favourable time for selling produce. The Squire cheerfully agreed to lend it him: there was no risk.

"But I'd counsel you to remember one thing, Nash Caromel—that you have a wife," said he, as they came out of the room when Nash was going away. "It's time you left off dallying with that other young woman."

Nash laughed a laugh that had an uneasy sound in it. "It is nothing, Todhetley."

"Glad to hear you say so," said the Pater. "She has the reputation of being a dangerous flirt. *You* are not the first man she has entangled, if all tales be true. Get out of Nave's house and into your own."

"I will," acquiesced Nash.

Perhaps that was easier said than done. It happened that the same evening I overheard a few words between the lawyer and Nash. They were not obliged to apply to Miss Nave: but, the chances were that they did.

The Squire sent me to Nave's when dinner was over, to take a note to Nash. Nave's smart waiting-maid, in a muslin apron and cherry cap-strings, was standing at the door talking and laughing with some young man, under cover of the twilight. She was as fond of finery as her mistress; perhaps as fond of sweethearts.

"Mr. Caromel? Yes, sir, he is at home. Please to walk in."

Showing me to a sitting-room on the left-hand side of the passage—the lawyer's offices were on the right—she shut me in, and went, as I supposed, to tell Caromel. At the back of this room was the dining-room. I heard the rattle of glasses on the table through the unlatched folding doors, and, next, the rattle of voices. The lawyer and Nash were sitting over their wine.

"You must marry her," said Nave, concisely.

"I wish I could," returned Nash; and his wavering, irresolute tone was just a contrast to the other's keen one. "I want to. But how can I? I'm heartily sorry."

"And as soon as may be. *You must.* Attentions paid to young ladies cannot be allowed to end in smoke. And you will find her thousand pounds useful."

"But how *can* I, I say?" cried Nash ruefully. "You know how impracticable it is—the impediment that exists."

"Stuff and nonsense, Caromel! Where there's a will there's a way. Impediments only exist to be got over."

"It would take a cunning man to get over the one that lies between me and her. I assure you, and you may know I say it in all good

faith, that I should ask nothing better than to be a free man to-morrow—for this one sole cause."

"Leave things to me. For all you know, you are free now."

The opening of their door by the maid, who had taken her own time to do it, and the announcement that I waited to see Mr. Caromel, stopped the rest. Nash came in, and I gave him the note.

"Wants to see me before twelve to-morrow, does he?—something he forgot to say," cried he, running his eyes over it. "Tell the Squire I will be there, Johnny."

Caromel was very busy after that, getting into his house—for he took the Squire's advice, and did not linger much longer at Nave's. And I think two or three weeks only had passed, after he was in it, when news reached him of his wife's death.

It came from his agent in New York, Abraham B. Whitter, who had received the information from San Francisco. Mr. Whitter enclosed the San Francisco letters. They were written by a Mr. Munn: one letter to himself, the other (which was as yet not unsealed) to Nash Caromel.

We read them both: Nash brought them

to the Squire before sending them to Mrs. Tinkle—considerate as ever, he would not let her see them until she had been prepared. The letters did not say much. Mrs. Nash Caromel had grown weaker and weaker after Nash departed from San Francisco for New York, and she finally sank under low fever. A diary, which she had kept the last few weeks of her life, meant only for her husband's own eye, together with a few letters and sundry other personal trifles, would be forwarded the first opportunity to Abraham B. Whitter and Co., who would hold the box at Mr. Caromel's disposal.

"Who is he, this Francis Munn, that writes to you?" asked the Squire. "A friend of your wife's?—she appears to have died at his house."

"A true friend of hers and of mine," answered Nash. "It was with Mr. and Mrs. Munn that I left Charlotte, when I was obliged to go to New York. She was not well enough to travel with me."

"Well—look here, Caromel—don't go and marry that other Charlotte," advised the Squire. "She is as different from your wife as chalk is from cheese. Poor thing! it was a hard fate—dying over there away from everybody!"

But now—would anybody believe it?—instead of taking the Squire's advice and not marrying her at all, instead even of allowing a decent time to elapse, in less than a week Nash went to church with Charlotte the Second. Shame, said Parson Holland under his breath; shame, said the parish aloud; but Nash Caromel heeded them not.

We only knew it on the day before the wedding was to be. On Wednesday morning, a fine, crisp, October day, a shooting party was to meet at old Appleton's, who lived over beyond Church Dykely. The Squire and Tod started for it after an early breakfast, and they let me go part of the way with them. Just after passing Caromel's Farm, we met Pettipher the postman.

"Anything for the Manor?" asked the Pater.

"Yes, sir," answered the man; and, diving into his bundle, he handed a letter.

"This is not mine," said the Squire, looking at the address; "this is for Mr. Caromel."

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir; I took out the wrong letter. This is yours."

"What a thin letter!—come from foreign parts," remarked the Pater, reading the address, "Nash Caromel, Esq." "I seem to

know the handwriting: fancy I've seen it before. Here, take it, Pettipher."

In passing the letter to Pettipher, which was a ship's letter, I looked at the said writing. Very small poor writing indeed, with long angular tails to the letters up and down, especially the capitals. The Squire handed me his gun and was turning to walk on, opening his letter as he did so; when Pettipher spoke and arrested him.

"Have you heard what's coming off yonder, to-morrow, sir?" asked he, pointing with his thumb to Caromel's Farm.

"Why no," said the Squire, wondering what Pettipher meant to be at. "What should be coming off?"

"Mr. Caromel's going to bring a wife home. Leastways, going to get married."

"I don't believe it," burst forth the Pater, after staring angrily at the man. "You'd better take care what you say, Pettipher."

"But it's true, sir," reasoned Pettipher, "though it's not generally known. My niece is apprentice to Mrs. King the dressmaker, as perhaps you know, sir, and they are making Miss Nave's wedding-dress and bonnet. They are to be married quite early, sir, nine o'clock, before folks are about. Well yes, sir, it is

not seemly, seeing he has but now heard of his wife's death, poor Miss Charlotte Tinkle, that grew up among us—but you'll find it's true."

Whether the Squire gave more hot words to Nash Caromel, or to Charlotte the Second, or to Pettipher for telling it, I can't say now. Pettipher touched his hat, said good morning, and turned up the avenue to Caromel's Farm, to leave the letter for Nash.

And, married they were on the following morning, amidst a score or two of spectators. What was agate had slipped out to others as well as ourselves. Old Clerk Bumford looked more angry than a raven when he saw us flocking into the church, after Nash had fee'd him to keep it quiet.

As the clock struck nine, the party came up. The bride and one of her sisters, both in white silk; Nave and some strange gentleman, who might be a friend of his; and Caromel, paler than a ghost. Charlotte the Second was pale too, but uncommonly pretty, her mass of beautiful hair shining like threads of gold.

The ceremony over, they filed out into the porch; Nash leading his bride, and Nave bringing up the rear alone; when an anxious-

looking little woman with a chronic redness of face was seen coming across the churchyard. It was Mrs. Tinkle, wearing the deep mourning she had put on for Charlotte. Somebody had carried her the tidings, and she had come running forth to see whether they *could* be true.

And, to watch her, poor thing, with her scared face raised to Nash, and her poor hands clasped in pain, as he and his bride passed her on the pathway, was something sad. Nash Caromel's face had grown white again; but he never looked at her; never turned his eyes, fixed straight out before him, a hair's point to the right or left.

"May Heaven have mercy upon them—for surely they'll need it!" cried the poor woman. "No luck can come of such a wedding as this."

III.

The months went on. Mrs. Nash was ruling the roast at Caromel's Farm, being unquestionably both mistress and master. Nash Caromel's old easy indolence had grown now to apathy. It almost seemed as though the farm might go as it liked for him; but his wife was energetic, and she kept servants of all kinds to their work.

Nash excused himself for his hasty wedding when people reproached him—and a few had done that on his return from the honeymoon. His first wife had been dead for some months, he said, and the farm wanted a mistress. She had only been dead to him a week, was the answer he got to this: and, as to the farm, he was quite as competent to manage that himself without a mistress as with one. After all, where was he use of bothering about it when the thing was done?—and the offence concerned himself, not his neighbours. So the matter was condoned at length; Nash was taken into favour again, and the past dropped.

But Nash, as I have told you, grew apathetic. His spirits were low; the Squire remarked one day that he was like a man who had some inward care upon him. Mrs. Nash, on the contrary, was cheerful as a summer's day; she filled the farm with visitors, and made the money fly.

All too soon, a baby arrived. It was in May, and he must have travelled at railroad speed. Nurse Picker, called in hastily on the occasion, could not find anything the matter with him. A beautiful boy, she said, as like his father, Master Nash (she had known Nash

as a boy), as one pea was like another. Mrs. Nash told a tale of having been run after by a cow; Duffham, when attacked by the parish on the point, shut his lips, and would say never a word, good or bad. Anyway, here he was; a fine little boy and the son-and-heir: and if he had mistaken the proper time to appear, why clearly it must be his own fault or the cow's: other people were not to be blamed for it. Mrs. Nash Caromel, frantic with delight at its being a boy, sent an order to old Bumford to set the bells a-ringing.

But now, it was a singular thing that the Squire should chance to be present at the delivery of another of those letters that bore the handwriting with the angular tails. Not but that very singular coincidences do take place in this life, and I often think it would not hurt us if we paid more heed to them. Caromel's Farm was getting rather behindhand with its payments. Whether through its master's apathy or its mistress's extravagance, ready money grew inconveniently short, and the Squire could not get his interest paid on the twelve hundred pounds.

"I'll go over and jog his memory," said he one morning, as we got up from breakfast. "Put on your cap, Johnny."

There was a pathway to Caromel's across the fields, and that was the way we took. It was a hot, lovely day, early in July. Some wheat on the Caromel land was already down.

"Splendid weather it has been for the corn," cried the Squire, turning himself about, "and we shall have a splendid harvest. Somehow I always fancy the crops ripen on this land sooner than on any other about here, Johnny."

"So they do, sir."

"Fine rich land it is: shouldn't grumble if it were mine. We'll go in at this gate, lad."

"This gate" was the side gate. It opened on a path that led direct to the sitting-room with glass doors. Nash was standing just inside the room, and of all the uncomfortable expressions that can sit on a man's face, the worst sat on his. The Squire noticed it, and spoke in a whisper.

"Johnny, lad, he looks just as though he had seen a ghost."

It's just what he did look like—a ghost that frightened him. We were close up before he noticed us. Giving a great start, he smoothed his face, smiled, and held out his hand.

"You don't look well," said the Squire, as he sat down. "What's amiss?"

"Nothing at all," answered Nash. "The heat pothers me, as usual: can't sleep at night for it. Why, here's the postman! What makes him so late, I wonder?"

Pettipher was coming straight down to the window, letters in hand. Something in his free, onward step seemed to say that he must be in the habit of delivering the letters to Nash at that same window.

"Two, sir, this morning," said Pettipher, handing them in.

As Nash was taking the letters, one of them fell, either by his own awkwardness or by Pettipher's. I picked it up and gave it to him, address upwarsd. The Squire saw it.

"Why, that's the same handwriting that puzzled me," cried he, speaking on the impulse of the moment. "It seemed familiar to me, but I could not remember where I had seen it. It's a ship letter, as was the other."

Nash laughed—a lame kind of laugh—and put both letters into his pocket. "It comes from a chum of mine that I picked up over yonder," said he to the Squire, nodding his head towards where the sea might be supposed to lie. "I don't think you could ever have been familiar with it."

They went away to talk of business, leaving me alone. Mrs. Nash Caromel came in with her baby. She wore a white dress and light green ribbons, a lace cap half shading her bright hair. Uncommonly pretty she looked —but I did not like her.

"Is it you, Johnny Ludlow?" said she, pausing a moment at the door, and then holding out her hand. "I thought my husband was here alone."

"He is gone into the library with the Squire."

"Sit down. Have you seen my baby before? Is he not a beauty?"

It was a nice little fellow, with fat arms and blue knitted shoes, a good deal like Nash. They had named him Duncan, after some relative of hers, and the result was that he was never called anything but "Dun." Mrs. Caromel was telling me that she had "short-coated" him early, as it was hot weather, when the others appeared, and the Squire marched me off.

"Johnny," said he, thoughtfully, as we went along, "how curiously Nash Caromel is altered!"

"He seems rather—*down*, sir," I answered, hesitating for a word.

"Down!" echoed the Squire, slightingly; "it's more than that. He seems lost."

"Lost, sir?"

"His mind does. When I told him what I had come about: that it was time, and long ago, too, that my interest was paid, he stared at me more like a lunatic than a farmer—as if he had forgotten all about it, interest, and money, and all. When his wits came to him, he said it ought to have been paid, and he'd see Nave about it. Nave's his father-in-law, Johnny, and I suppose will take care of his interests; but I know I'd as soon entrust my affairs to Old Scratch as to him."

The Squire had his interest paid. The next news we heard was that Caromel's Farm was about to give an entertainment on a grand scale; an afternoon fête out of doors, with a sumptuous cold collation that you might call by what name you liked—dinner, tea, or supper—in the evening. An invitation printed on a square card came to us, which we all crowded round Mrs. Todhetley to look at.—Cards had not come much into fashion then, except for public ceremonies, such as the Mayor's Feast at Worcester. In our part of the world we were still content to write our invitations on note-paper.

The Mother would not go. She did not care for fêtes, she said to us. In point of fact she did not like Mrs. Nash Caromel any better than she had liked Charlotte Nave, and she had never believed in the cow. So she sent a civil note of excuse for herself. The Squire accepted, after some hesitation. He and the Caromels had been friends for so many years that he did not care to put the slight of a refusal upon Nash; besides, he liked parties, if they were jolly.

But now, would any rational being believe that Mrs. Nash had the cheek to send an invitation to Mrs. Tinkle and her son Henry? It was what Harry Tinkle called it—cheek. When poor Mrs. Tinkle broke the red seal of the huge envelope, and read the card of invitation, from Mr. and Mrs. Caromel, her eyes were dim.

"I think they must have sent it as a cruel joke," remarked Mrs. Tinkle, meeting the Squire a day or two before the fête. "She has never spoken to me in her life. When we pass each other she picks up her skirts as if they were too good to touch mine. Once she laughed at me, rudely."

"Don't believe she knows any better," cried the Squire in his hot partisanship. "Her

skirts were not fit to touch your own Charlotte's."

"Oh, Charlotte! poor Charlotte!" cried Mrs. Tinkle, losing her equanimity. "I wish I could hear the particulars of her last moments," she went on, brushing away the tears. "If Mr. Caromel has had details—and that letter, telling of her death, promised them, you know—he does not disclose them to me."

"Why don't you write a note and ask him, Mrs. Tinkle?"

"I hardly know why," she answered. "I think he cannot have heard, or he would surely tell me; he is not bad-hearted."

"No, only too easy; swayed by anybody that may be at his elbow for the time being," concluded the Squire. "Nash Caromel is one of those people who need to be kept in leading strings all their lives. Good morning."

It was a fête worth going to. The afternoon as sunny a one as ever August turned out, and the company gay, if not numerous. Only a sprinkling of ladies could be seen: but amongst them was Miles Caromel's widow, with her four daughters. Being women of consideration, deserving the respect of the world, their presence went for much, and Mrs. Nash had cause to thank them. They scorned

and despised her in their hearts, but they countenanced her for the sake of the honour of the Caromels.

Archery, dancing, promenading, and talking took up the afternoon, and then came the banquet. Altogether it must have cost Caromel's Farm a tidy sum.

"It is well for you to be able to afford this," cried the Squire confidentially to Nash, as they stood together in one of the shady paths beyond the light of the coloured lanterns, when the evening was drawing to an end. "Miles would never have done it."

"Oh, I don't know—it's no harm once in a way," answered Nash, who had exerted himself wonderfully, and finished up by drinking his share of wine. "Miles had his ways, and I have mine."

"All right: it is your own affair. But I'd not have done one thing, my good friend—sent an invitation to your mother-in-law."

"What mother-in-law?" asked Nash, staring.

"Your ex-mother-in-law, I ought to have said—Mrs. Tinkle. I'd not have done it, Caromel, under the circumstances. It pained her."

"But who did send her an invitation?" Is

it likely? I don't know what you are talking of, Squire."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" returned the Squire, perceiving that the act was Madam's and not his. "Have you ever had those particulars of Charlotte's death?"

Nash Caromel's face changed from red to a deadly pallor: the question unnerved him—took his wits out of him.

"The particulars of Charlotte's death," he stammered, looking all abroad. "What particulars?"

"Why, those promised you by the man who wrote from San Francisco—Munn was his name? Charlotte's diary, and letters, and things, that he was sending off to New York."

"Oh—ay—I remember," answered Nash, pulling his senses together. "No, they have not come."

"Been lost on the way, do you suppose? What a pity!"

"They may have been. I have not had them."

Nash Caromel walked straight away with the last words. Either to get rid of the subject, or to join some people who had just then crossed the top of the path.

"Caromel does not like talking of her: I can see that, Johnny," remarked the Squire to me later. "I don't believe he'd have done as he did, but for this second Charlotte throwing her wiles across his path. He fell into the snare and his conscience pricks him."

"I daresay, sir, it will come right with time. She is very pretty."

"Yes, most crooked things come straight with time," assented the Squire. "Perhaps this one will."

Would it, though!

The weeks and the months went on. Caromel's Farm seemed to prosper, its mistress being a most active manager, ruling with an apparently soft will, but one firm as iron; and little Dun grew to be about fifteen months old. The cow might have behaved ungenteelly to him, as Miss Bailey's ghost says to Captain Smith, but it had not hurt the little fellow, or his stout legs either, which began now to be running him into all kinds of mischief. And so the time came round again to August—just a year after the fête, and nearly twenty-two months after Nash's second marriage.

One evening, Tod being out and Mrs. Todhetley in the nursery, I was alone with the Squire in the twilight. The great harvest

moon was rising behind the trees; and the Squire, talking of some parish grievance that he had heard of from old Jones the constable, let it rise: while I was wishing he would call for lights that I might get on with "The Old English Baron," which I was reading for about the seventeenth time.

"And you see, Johnny, if Jones had been firm, as I told him this afternoon, and taken the fellow up, instead of letting him slope off and be lost, the poachers —— Who's this coming in, lad?"

The Squire had caught sight of some one turning to the door from the covered path. I saw the fag end of a petticoat.

"I think it must be Mrs. Scott, sir. The mother said she had promised to come over one of these first evenings."

"Ay," said the Squire. "Open the door for her, Johnny."

I had the front door open in a twinkling, and saw a lady with a travelling cloak on her, arm. But she bore no resemblance to Mrs. Scott.

"Is Mr. Todhetley at home?"

The soft voice gave me a thrill and a shock, though years had elapsed since I heard it. A confused doubt came rushing over me; a per-

plexing question well-nigh passed my lips: "Is it a living woman or a dead one?" For there, before me, stood Nash Caromel's dead wife, Charlotte the First.

CAROMEL'S FARM.

CHARLOTTE AND CHARLOTTE.

PEOPLE are apt to say, when telling of a surprise, that the touch of a feather would have made them fall. I nearly fell without the feather and without the touch. To see a dead woman standing straight up before me, and to hear her say "How are you, and is the Squire at home?" might have upset the balance of a giant.

But I could not be mistaken. There, waiting at the front door to come in, her face within an inch of mine, was Nash Caromel's first wife, Charlotte Tinkle; who for some two years now had been looked upon as dead and buried over in California.

"Is Mr. Todhetley at home?" she repeated. "And can I see him?"

"Yes," I answered, coming partially out of my daze. "Do you mind staying here just a minute, while I tell him?"

For, to hand in a dead woman, might take him aback, as it had taken me. The Pater stood bolt upright, waiting for Mrs. Scott (as he had supposed it to be) to enter.

"It is not Mrs. Scott," I whispered, shutting the door and going close up to him to speak. "It—it is someone else. I hardly like to tell you, sir; she may give you a fright."

"Why, what does the lad mean?—what are you making a mystery of now, Johnny? cried he, staring at me. "Give me a fright! I should like to see any woman give me that. Is it Mrs. Scott, or is it not?"

"It is someone we thought was dead, sir."

"Now, Johnny, don't be a muff. Somebody you thought was dead! What on earth's come to you, lad? Speak out?"

"It is Nash Caromel's first wife, sir: Charlotte Tinkle."

The Pater gazed at me as a man bereft of reason. I don't believe he knew whether he stood on his head or his heels. "Charlotte Tinkle!" he exclaimed, backing against the curtain. "What, come to life, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir, and she wants to see you. Perhaps she has never been dead."

"Bless my heart and mind! Bring her in."

The first thing Charlotte the First did when

she came in and the Squire clasped her by her two hands, was to burst into a fit of sobs. Some wine stood on the sideboard; the Squire poured her out a glass, and she untied the strings of her bonnet as she sat down.

"If I might take it off for a minute?" she said. "I have had it on all the way from Liverpool."

"Do so, my dear. Goodness me! I think I must be in a dream. And so you are not dead!"

"Yes, I knew it was what you must have all been thinking," she answered, stifling her sobs. "Poor Nash!—what a dreadful thing it is! I cannot imagine how the misconception can have arisen."

"What misconception?" asked the Pater, whose wits, once gone a wool-gathering, rarely came back in a hurry.

"That I had died."

"Why, that friend of yours with whom you were staying—Bunn—Munn—which was it, Johnny?—wrote to tell your husband so."

Mrs. Nash Caromel, sitting there in the twilight, her brown hair as smooth as ever and her eyes as meek, looked at the Squire in surprise.

"Oh no, that could not have been; Mr.

Munn would not be likely to write anything of the sort. Impossible."

"But, my dear lady, I read the letter. Your husband brought it to me as soon as it reached him. You remained at San Francisco, very ill after Nash's departure, and you got no better, and died at last of low fever."

She shook her head. "I was very poorly indeed when Nash left, but I grew better shortly. I had no low fever, and I certainly did not die."

"Then why did Munn write it?"

"He did not write it. He could not have written it. I am quite certain of that. He and his wife are my very good and dear friends, and most estimable people."

"The letter certainly came to your husband," persisted the Squire. "I read it with my own eyes. It was dated San Francisco, and signed Francis Munn."

"Then it was a forgery. But why anyone should have written it, or troubled themselves about me and my husband at all, I cannot imagine."

"And then, Nash—Nash—good gracious, what a complication!" cried the Squire, breaking off what he meant to say, as the thought of Charlotte Nave crossed his mind.

"I know," she quietly put in: "Nash has married again."

It was a complication, and no mistake, all things considered. The Squire rubbed up his hair and deliberated, and then bethought himself that it might be as well to keep the servants out of the room. So I went to tell old Thomas that the master was particularly engaged with a friend, and no one was to come in unless rung for. Then I ran upstairs to whisper the news to the Mother—and it pretty nearly sent her into a fit of hysterics.

Charlotte Caromel was entering on her history to the Squire when I got back. "Yes," she said, "I and my husband went to California, having found little luck in America. Nash made one or two ventures there also, but nothing seemed to succeed; not as well even as it did in America, and he resolved to go back there, and try at something or other again. He sailed for New York, leaving me in San Francisco with Francis Munn and his wife; for I had been ill, and was not strong enough for the tedious voyage. The Munns kept a dry-goods store at San Francisco, and——"

"A dry-goods store!" interrupted the Squire.

"Yes. You cannot afford to be fastidious

over there; and to be in trade is looked upon as an honour, rather than the contrary. Francis Munn was the youngest son of a country gentleman in England; he went to California to make his fortune at anything that might turn up; and it ended in his marrying and keeping a store. They made plenty of money, and were very kind to me and Nash. Well, Nash started for New York, leaving me with them, and he wrote to me soon after his arrival there. Things were looking gloomy in the States, he said, and he felt inclined to take a run over to England, and ask his brother Miles to help him with some money. I wrote back a letter in duplicate, addressing one to the agents' in New York, the other to Caromel's Farm—not knowing, you perceive, in which place he might be. No answer reached me—but people think little of the safety of letters out there, so many seem to miscarry. We fancied Nash might be coming back to San Francisco and did not trouble himself to write: like me, he is not much of a scribe. But the months went on, and he did not come; he neither came nor wrote."

"What did you think hindered him?"

"We did not know what to think—except, as I say, that the letters had miscarried. One

day Mr. Munn brought in a file of English newspapers for me and his wife to read: and in one of them I saw an announcement that puzzled me greatly—the marriage of one Nash Caromel, of Caromel's Farm, to Charlotte Nave. Just at first it startled me; I own that; but I felt so sure it could not be my Nash, my husband, that I remained only puzzled to know what Nash Caromel it could be."

"There is only one Nash Caromel," growled the Squire, half inclined to tell her she was a simpleton—taking things in this equable way.

"I only knew of him; but I thought he must have some relative, a cousin perhaps, of the same name, of whom I had not heard. However," continued Charlotte, "I wrote then to Caromel's Farm, telling Nash what we had read, and asking him what it meant, and where he was. But that letter shared the fate of the former one, and obtained no reply. In the course of time we saw another announcement —The wife of Nash Caromel of a son. Still I did not believe it could be my Nash, but I could see that Mr. Munn did believe it was. At least he thought there was something strange about it all, especially our not hearing from Nash: and at length I determined to come home and see about it."

"You must have been a long while coming," remarked the Squire. "The child is fifteen months old."

"But you must remember that often we did not get news until six months after its date. And I chose a most unfortunate route—overland from California to New York."

"What on earth!——why, people are sometimes a twelvemonth, or so, doing that!" cried the Squire. "There are rocky mountains to scale, as I've heard and read, and Red Indians to encounter, and all sorts of horrors. Those who undertake it travel in bands, do they not, and are called pilgrims, and some of them don't get to the end of the journey alive."

"True," she sighed. "I would never have attempted it had I known what it would be: but I did so dread the sea. Several of us were laid up midway, and had to be left behind at a small settlement: one or two died. It was a long, long time, and only after surmounting great discomforts and difficulties, we reached New York."

"Well?" said the Squire. It must be remembered that they were speaking of days now gone by, when the journey was just what she described it.

"I could hear nothing of my husband in

New York," she resumed, "except that Abraham Whitter believed him to be at home here. I took the steamer for Liverpool, landed at dawn this morning, and came on by rail. And I find it *is* my husband who is married. And what am I to do?"

She melted away into tears and sobs again. The Squire told her that she must present herself at the Farm; she was its legal mistress, and Nash Caromel's true wife. But she shook her head at this: she'd not bring any such trouble upon Nash for the world, as to show him suddenly that she was living. What he had done he must have done unwittingly, she said, believing her to be dead, and he ought not to suffer for it more than could be helped. Which was a lenient way of reasoning that put the Squire's temper up.

"He deserves no quarter, ma'am, and *I* will not give it him if you do. Within a week of the time he heard of your death he went and took that Charlotte Nave. Though I expect it was she who took him — brazen hussy! And I am glad you have come to put her out!"

But, nothing would induce Charlotte the First to assume this view, or to admit that blame could attach to Nash. Once he had

lost her by death, he had a right to marry again, she contended. As to the haste—well, she had been dead (as he supposed) a great many months when he heard of it, and that should be considered. The Squire exploded, and walked about the room, and rubbed his head the wrong way, and thought her no better than an imbecile.

Mrs. Todhetley came in, and there was a little scene. Charlotte declined our offer of a bed and refreshment, saying she would like to go to her mother's for the night: she felt that she should be received gladly, though they had parted in anger and had held no communication with one another since.

Gladly! ay, joyfully. Little doubt of that. So the Squire put on his hat, and she her bonnet, and away they started, and I with them.

We took the lonely path across the fields: her appearance might have raised a stir in the highway. Charlotte was but little altered, and would have been recognised at once. And I have no space to tell of the scene at Mrs. Tinkle's, which was as good as a play, or of the way they rushed into one another's arms.

"Johnny, there's something on my mind,"

said the Squire in a low tone as we were going back towards home: and he was looking grave and silent as a judge. "Do you remember those two foreign letters we chanced to see of Nash Caromel's, with the odd handwriting, all quavers and tails?"

"Yes, I do, sir. They were ship letters."

"Well, lad, a very ugly suspicion has come into my head, and I can't drive it away. I believe those two letters were from Charlotte —the two she speaks of—I believe the handwriting which puzzled me was hers. Now, if so, Nash went to the altar with that other Charlotte, knowing this one was alive: for the first letter came the day before the marriage."

I did not answer. But I remembered what I had overheard Nave the lawyer say to Nash Caromel: "You must marry her: where there's a will there's a way"—or words to that effect. Had Nave concocted the letters which pretended to tell of Mrs. Nash Caromel's death, and got them posted to Nash from New York?

With the morning, the Squire was at Caromel's Farm. The old-fashioned low house, the sun shining on its quaint windows, looked still and quiet as he walked up to the front

door across the grass-plat, in the middle of which grew a fine mulberry tree. The news of Charlotte's return, as he was soon to find, had travelled to it already; had spread to the village. For she had been recognised the night before on her arrival; and her boxes, left in charge of a porter, bore her full name, Mrs. Nash Caromel.

Nash stood in that little library of his in a state of agitation not to be described; he as good as confessed, when the Squire tackled him, that he *had* known his wife might have been alive and that it was all Nave's doings. At least he suspected that the letter, telling of her death, might be a forgery.

"Anyway, you got a letter from her the day before you married, so you must have known it by that," cried the Squire; who had so much to do always with the Caromel family that he deemed it his duty to interfere. "What on earth could have possessed you?"

"I—was driven into a corner," gasped Nash.

"I'd be driven into fifty corners before I'd marry two wives," retorted the Squire. "And now, sir, what do you mean to do?"

"I can't tell," answered Nash.

"A pretty kettle of fish this is! What do

you suppose your father would have said to it?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," repeated Nash helplessly, biting his lips to get some life into them.

"And what's the matter with your hands that they are so hot and white?"

Nash glanced at his hands, and hid them away in his pockets. He looked like a man consumed by inward fever.

"I have not been over well for some time past," said he.

"No wonder—with the consciousness of this discovery hanging over your head! It might have sent some men into their graves."

Nash drummed upon the window pane. What in the world to do, what to say, evidently he knew not.

"You must put away this Jez—this lady," went on the Squire. "It was she who bewitched you; ay, and set herself out to do it, as all the parish saw. Let her go back to her father: you might make some provision for her: and instal your wife here in her proper place. Poor thing! she is so meek and patient! She won't hear a word said against you; thinks you are a saint. *I* think you a scoundrel, Nash: and I tell you so to your face."

The door had slowly opened; somebody, who had been outside, listening, put in her head. A very pretty head, and that's the truth, surmounting a fashionable morning costume of rose-coloured muslin, all flounces and furbelows. It was Charlotte the Second. The Squire had called her a brazen hussy behind her back; he had much ado this morning not to call her so to her face.

"What's that I hear you saying to my husband, Mr. Todhetley?—that he should discard me and admit that creature here! How dare you bring your pernicious counsels into this house?"

"Why, bless my heart, he is her husband, madam; he is not yours. You'd not stay here yourself, surely!"

"This is my home, and he is *my* husband, and my child is his heir; and that woman may go back over the seas whence she came. Is it not so, Nash? Tell him."

She put her hand on Nash's shoulder, and he tried to get out something or other in obedience to her. He was as much under her finger and thumb as Punch in the street is under the showman's. The Squire went into a purple heat.

"You married him by craft, madam—as I

believe from my very soul: you married him, knowing, you and your father also, that his wife was alive. He knew it, too. The motive must have been one of urgency, I should say, but I've nothing to do with that——"

"Nor with any other business of ours," she answered with a brazen face.

"This business is mine, and all Church Dykely's," flashed the Squire. "It is public property. And now, I ask you both, what you mean to do in this dilemma you have brought upon yourselves? His wife is waiting to come in, and you cannot keep her out."

"She shall never come in; I tell you that," flashed Charlotte the Second. "She sent word to him that she was dead, and she must abide by it; from that time she was dead to him, dead for ever. Mr. Caromel married me equally in the eyes of the world: and here I shall stay with him, his true and lawful wife."

The Squire rubbed his face; the torrent of words and the heat made it glisten.

"Stay here, would you, madam! What luck do you suppose would come of that?"

"Luck! I have quite as much luck as I require. Nash, why do you not request this—this gentleman to leave us?"

"Why, he *dare* not keep you here," cried

the Squire, passing over the last compliment. "He would be prosecuted for—you know what."

"Let him be prosecuted! Let the wicked woman do her worst. Let her bring an action, and we'll defend it. I have more right to him than she has. Mr. Caromel, *do* you wish to keep up this interview until night?"

"Perhaps you had better go now, Squire," put in the man pleadingly. "I—I will consult Nave, and see what's to be done. She may like to go back to California, to the Munns; the climate suited her: and—and an income might be arranged."

This put the finishing stroke to the Squire's temper. He flung out of the room with a few unorthodox words, and came home in a tantrum.

We had had times of commotion at Church Dykely before, but this affair capped all. The one Mrs. Nash Caromel waiting to go into her house, and the other Mrs. Nash Caromel refusing to go out of it to make room for her. The Squire was right when saying it was public property: the public made it theirs. Tongues pitched into Nash Caromel in the fields and in the road: but some few of us pitied him, thinking what on earth we could

do ourselves in a like position. While old Jones the constable stalked briskly about, expecting to get a warrant for taking up the master of Caromel's Farm.

But the great drawback, to instituting legal proceedings, lay with Mrs. Nash Caromel the First. She declined to prosecute. Her husband might refuse to receive her; might hold himself aloof from her; might keep his second wife by his side; but she would never hurt a hair of his head. Heaven might bring things round in its own good time, she said; meanwhile she would submit—and bear.

And she held to this, driving indignant men distracted. They argued, they persuaded, they remonstrated; it was said that one or two strong-minded ones *swore*. All the same. She stayed on at her mother's, and would neither injure her husband herself, nor let her family injure him. Henry Tinkle, her brother, chanced to be from home (as he was when she had run away to be married), or he might have acted in spite of her. And, when this state of things had continued for two or three weeks, the world began to call it a "crying scandal." As to Nash Caromel, he did not show his face abroad.

"Not a day longer shall the fellow retain

my money," said the Pater, speaking of the twelve hundred pounds he had lent to Nash: and in fact the term it had been lent for was already up. But it is easier to make such a threat than to enforce it; and it is not everybody who can extract twelve hundred pounds at will from uncertain coffers. Anyway the Squire found he could not. He wrote to Nash, demanding its return; and he wrote to Nave.

Nash did not answer him at all. Nave's clerk sent a semi-insolent letter, saying Mr. Caromel should be communicated with when occasion offered. The Squire wrote in a rage to his lawyer at Worcester, bidding him enforce the repayment.

"You two lads can take the letter to the post," said he.

But we had not got many yards from home when we heard the Squire coming after us. We all walked into Church Dykely together; and close to the post office, which was at Dame Chad's shop, we met Duffham. Of course the Squire, who could not keep anything in had he been bribed to do it, told Duffham what steps he was about to take.

"Going to enforce payment," nodded

Duffham. "The man deserves no quarter. But he is ill."

"Serve him right. What's the matter with him?"

"Nervous fever. Has fretted or frightened himself into it. Report says that he is very ill indeed."

"Don't you attend him?"

"Not I. I did not please madam at the time the boy was born—would not give in to some of her whims and fancies. They have called in that new doctor who has settled in the next parish, young Bluck."

"Why, he is no better than an apothecary's boy, that young Bluck! Caromel can't be very ill, if they have him."

"So ill, that, as I have just heard, he is in great danger—likely to die," replied Duffham, tapping his cane against the ledge of Dame Chad's window. "Bluck's young, but he is clever."

"Bless my heart! Likely to die! What, Nash Caromel! Here, you lads, if that's it, I won't annoy him just now about the money, so don't post the letter."

"It is posted," said Tod. "I have just put it in."

"Go in and explain to Dame Chad, and get

it out again. Or, stay; the letter can go, and I'll write and say it's not to be acted on until he is well. Nervous fever! I'm afraid his conscience has been pricking him."

"I hope it has," said Duffham.

II.

A few days went on. Nash Caromel lay in the greatest danger. Nave was at the farm day and night. A physician was called in from a distance to aid young Bluck; but it was understood that there remained but little hope of recovery. We began to feel sorry for Nash and to excuse his offences, the Squire especially. It was all that strong-minded young woman's doings, said he; she had got him into her toils, and he had not had the pluck, first or last, to escape them.

But a change for the better took place; Nash passed the crisis, and would probably, with care, recover. I think everybody felt glad; one does not wish a fellow quite to die, though he has misunderstood the laws on the ticklish subject of matrimony. And the Squire felt vexed later when he learned that his lawyer had disregarded his countermanding letter and sent a peremptory threat to Nash of enforcing instant proceedings, unless the money

was repaid forthwith. That was not the only threat conveyed to Caromel's Farm. Harry Tinkle returned; and, despite his sister's protestations, took the matter into his own hands, and applied for the warrant that had been so much talked of. As soon as Nash Caromel could leave his bed, he would be taken before the magistrates.

Soon a morning came that we did not forget in a hurry. While dressing with the window open to the white flowers of the trailing jessamine and the sweet perfume of the roses, blooming in the warm September air, Tod came in, fastening his braces.

"I say, Johnny, here's the jolliest lark! The Pater——"

And what the lark was, I don't know to this day. At that moment the passing-bell tolled out—three times three; with its succession of quick strokes following it. The wind blew in our direction from the church, and it sounded almost as though it were in the room.

"Who can be dead?" cried Tod, stretching his neck out at the window to listen. "Was anybody ill, Jenkins?" he called out to the head gardener, then coming up the path with a barrow; "do you know who that bell's tolling for?"

"It's for Mr. Caromel," answered Jenkins.

"What?" shouted Tod.

"It's tolling out for Mr. Caromel, sir. He died in the night."

It was a shock to us all. The Squire, pocketing his indignation against Madam and the Nave family in general, went over to the farm after breakfast, and saw Miss Gwendolen Nave, who was staying with her sister. They called her Gwinny.

"We heard that he was better—going on so well," gasped the Squire.

"So he was until a day or two ago," said Miss Gwinny, holding her handkerchief to her eyes. "Very well indeed until then—when it turned to typhus."

"Goodness bless me!" cried the Squire, an unpleasant feeling running through him. "Typhus!"

"Yes, I am sorry to say."

"Is it safe to be here? Safe for you all?"

"Of course it is a risk. We try not to be afraid, and have sent as many out of the house as we could. I and the old servant Grizzel alone remain with Mrs. Caromel. The baby has gone to papa's."

"Dear me, dear me! I was intending to ask to look at poor Nash; we have known

each other always, you see. But, perhaps it would not be prudent."

"It would be very imprudent, Mr. Todhetley. The sickness was of the worst type; it might involve not only your own death, but that of others to whom you might in turn carry it. You have a wife and children, sir."

"Yes, yes, quite right," rejoined the Squire. "Poor Nash! How is—your sister?" He would not, even at that trying moment for them, call her Mrs. Caromel.

"Oh, she is very ill; shocked and grieved almost to death. For all we know, she has taken the fever and may follow her husband; she attended upon him to the last. I hope that woman, who came here to disturb the peace of a happy family, that Charlotte Tinkle, will reap the fruit of what she has sown, for it is all owing to her."

"People do mostly reap the fruit of their own actions, whether they be good or bad," observed the Squire to this, as he got up to leave. But he would not add what he thought —that it was another Charlotte who ought to reap what she had sown. And who appeared to be doing it.

"Did the poor fellow suffer much?"

"Not at the last," said Miss Gwinny. "His

strength was gone, and he lay for many hours insensible. Up to yesterday evening we thought he might recover. Oh, it is a dreadful calamity!"

Indeed it was. The Squire came away echoing the words in his heart.

Three days later the funeral took place: it would not do to delay it longer. The Squire went to it: when a man was dead, he thought animosity should cease. Harry Tinkle would not go. Caromel, he said, had escaped him and the law, to which he had rendered himself amenable, and nobody might grumble at it, for it was the good pleasure of Heaven, but he would not show Caromel respect, dead or living.

All the parish seemed to have been bidden to the funeral. Some went, some did not go. It looked like a regular crowd, winding down the lawn and down the avenue. Few ventured indoors; they preferred to assemble outside: for an exaggerated fear of Caromel's Farm and what might be caught in it, pervaded the community. So, when the men came out of the house, staggering under the black velvet pall with its deep white border, followed by Lawyer Nave, the company fell up into line behind.

Little Dun would have been the legal heir to the property had there been no Charlotte the First. That complication stood in his way, and he could no more inherit it than I could. Under the peculiar circumstances *there was no male heir living*, and Nash Caromel, the last of his name, had the power to make a will. Whether he had done so, or not, was not known; but the question was set at rest after the return from the funeral. Nave had gone strutting next the coffin as chief mourner, and he now produced the will. Half a dozen gentlemen had entered, the Squire one of them.

It was executed, the will, all in due form, having been drawn up by a lawyer from a distance; not by Nave, who may have thought it as well to keep his fingers out of the pie. A few days after the return of Charlotte the First, when Nash first became ill, the strange lawyer was called in, and the will made.

Caromel's Farm and every stick and stone upon it, and all other properties possessed by Nash, were bequeathed to the little boy, Duncan Nave (as it was worded), otherwise Duncan Nave Caromel. Not to him unconditionally, but to be placed in the hands of trustees for his ultimate benefit. The child's mother (called

in the will Charlotte Nave, otherwise Charlotte Caromel) was to remain at the farm if she pleased, and to receive the yearly income derived from it for the mutual maintenance of herself and child. When the child should be twenty-one, he was to assume full possession, but his mother was at liberty to continue to have her home with him. In short they took all; Charlotte Tinkle, nothing.

"It is a wicked will," cried one of the hearers when they came out from listening to it.

"And it won't prosper them; you see if it does," added the Squire. "She stands in the place of Charlotte Tinkle. The least Caromel could have done, was to divide the property between them."

So that was the apparent ending of the Caromel business, which had caused the scandal in our quiet place, and a very unjust ending it was. Charlotte Tinkle, who had not a sixpence of her own in the world, remained on with her mother. She would come to church in her widow's mourning, a grievous look of sorrow upon her meek face; people said she would never get over the cruelty of not having been sent for to say farewell to her husband when he was dying.

As for Charlotte Nave, she stayed on at the farm without let or hindrance, calling herself, as before, Mrs. Nash Caromel. She appeared at church once in a way; not often. Her widow's veil was deeper than the other widow's, and her goffered cap larger. Nobody took the fever: and Nave the lawyer sent back the Squire's twelve hundred pounds within a month of Nash's death. And that, I say, was the ending, as we all supposed, of the affair at Caromel's Farm.

But curious complications were destined to crop up yet.

III.

Nash Caromel died in September. And in how short, or long, a time it was afterwards that a very startling report grew to be whispered, I cannot remember; but I think it must have been at the turn of winter. The two widows were deep in weeds as ever, but over Charlotte Nave a change had come. And I really think I had better call them in future Charlotte Tinkle and Charlotte Nave, or we may get in a fog between the two.

Charlotte Nave grew pale and thin. She ruled the farm, as before, with the deft hand of a capable woman, but her nature appeared to

be changing, her high spirits to have flown away for ever. Instead of filling the house with company, she secluded herself in it like a hermit, being scarcely ever seen abroad. Illnatured people, quoting Shakespeare, said the thorns, which in her bosom lay, did prick and sting her.

It was reported that the fear of the fever had taken a haunting hold upon her. She could not get rid of it. Which was onreasonable, as Nurse Picker phrased it; for if she'd ha' been to catch it, she'd ha' caught it at the time. It was not for herself alone she feared it, but for others, though she did fear it for herself still, very much indeed. An impression lay on her mind that the fever was not yet out of the house, and never would be out of it, and that any fresh person, coming in to reside, would be liable to take it. More than once she was heard to say she would give a great deal not to be tied to the place—but the farm could not get on without a head. Before Nash died, when it was known the disorder had turned to typhus, she had sent all the servants (except Grizzel) and little Dun out of the house. She would not let them come back to it. Dun stayed at the lawyer's; the servants in time got other situa-

tions. The gardener's wife went in by day to help old Grizzel with the work, and some of the out-door men lived in the bailiff's house. Nave let out one day that he had remonstrated with his daughter in vain. Some women are cowards in these matters; they can't help being so; and the inward fear, perpetually tormenting them, makes a havoc of their daily lives. But in this case the fear had grown to an exaggerated pitch. In short, not to mince the matter, it was suspected her brain, on that one point, was unhinged.

Miss Gwinny could not leave her. Another sister, Harriet Nave, had come to her father's house, to keep it and take care of little Dun. Dun was allowed to go into the grounds of the farm and to play under the mulberry tree on the lawn; and once or twice on a wet day, it was said, his mother had taken him into the parlour that opened with glass doors, but she never let him run the risk of going in farther. At last old Nave, as was reported, consulted a mad doctor about her, going all the way to Droitwich to do it.

But all this had nothing to do with the startling rumour I spoke of. Things were in this condition when it first arose. It was said that Nash Caromel "came again."

At first the whisper was not listened to, was ridiculed, laughed at: but when one or two credible witnesses protested they had seen him, people began to talk, and then to say there must be something in it.

A little matter that had occurred soon after the funeral, was remembered then. Nash Caromel had used to wear on his watch chain a small gold locket with his own and his wife's hair in it. I mean his real wife. Mrs. Tinkle wrote a civil note to the mistress of Caromel's Farm asking that the locket might be restored to her daughter—whose property it in fact was. She did not get any answer, and wrote again. The second letter was returned to Mrs. Tinkle in a blank envelope with a wide black border.

Upon this, Harry Tinkle took up the matter. Stretching a point for his sister, who was pining for the locket and Nash's bit of hair in it, for she possessed no memento at all of her husband, he called at the farm and saw the lady. Some hard words passed between them: she was contemptuously haughty; and he was full of inward indignation, not only at the general treatment accorded to his sister, but also at the unjust will. At last, stung by some sneering contumely she openly cast upon

his sister, he retorted in her own coin—answering certain words of hers:

"I hope his ghost will haunt you, you false woman!" Meaning, you know, the ghost of the dead man.

People recalled these words of Harry Tinkle's now, and began to look upon them (spoken by one of the injured Tinkles) in the light of prophecy. What with this, and what with their private belief that Nash Caromel's conscience would hardly allow him to rest quietly in his grave, they thought it very likely that his ghost *was* haunting her, and only hoped it would not haunt the parish.

Was this the cause of the change apparent in her? Could it be that Nash Caromel's spirit returned to the house in which he died, and that she could not rest for it? Was this the true reason, and not the fever, why she kept the child and the servants out of the house?—lest they should be scared by the sight? Gossips shivered as they whispered to one another of these unearthly doubts, which soon grew into belief. But you must please to understand that never a syllable had been heard from herself, or a hint given, that Caromel's Farm was troubled by anything of the kind; neither did she know, or was likely to

hear, that it was talked of abroad. Meanwhile, as the time slipped on, every now and then something would occur to renew the report—that Nash Caromel had been seen.

One afternoon, during a ride, the Squire's horse fell lame. On his return he sent for Dobbs, the blacksmith and farrier. Dobbs promised to be over about six o'clock; he was obliged to go elsewhere first. When six o'clock struck, the Squire, naturally impatient, began to look out for Dobbs. And if he sent Thomas out of the room once during dinner, to see whether the man had arrived, he sent him half a dozen times.

Seven o'clock, and no Dobbs. The Pater was in a fume; he did nothing but walk to and fro between the house and the stables, and call Dobbs names as he looked out for him. At last, there came a rush across the fold-yard, and Dobbs appeared, his face looking very peculiar, and his hair standing up in affright, like a porcupine's quills.

"Why, what on earth has taken you?" began the Squire, surprised out of the reproach that had been at his tongue's end.

"I don't know what has taken me," gasped Dobbs. "Except that I've seen Mr. Nash Caromel."

"What?" roared the Squire, his surprise changing to anger.

"As true as I'm a living man, I've seen him, sir," persisted Dobbs, wiping his face with a blue cotton handkerchief. "I've seen his shadow."

"Seen the Dickens!" retorted the Squire, slightingly. "One would think *he* was after you, by the way you flew up here. I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, Dobbs."

"Being later than I thought to be, sir, I took the field way; it's a bit shorter," went on Dobbs, attempting to explain. "In passing through that little copse at the back of Caromel's Farm, I met a curious looking shadow of a figure that somehow startled me. May I never stir from this spot, sir, if it was not Caromel himself."

"You have been drinking, Dobbs."

"A strapping pace I was going at, knowing I was being waited for here," continued Dobbs, too much absorbed in his story to heed the sarcasm. "I never saw Mr. Nash Caromel plainer in his lifetime than I saw him then, sir. Drinking? No, that I had not been, Squire; the place where I went to is tea-total. It was up at the Glebe, and they don't have nothing stronger in their house

than tea. They gave me two good cups of that."

"Tea plays some people worse tricks than drink, especially if it is green," observed the Squire: and I am bound to confess that Dobbs, putting his state of fright aside, seemed as sober as we were. "I'd not confess myself a fool, Dobbs, if I were you."

Dobbs put out his brawny right arm. "Master," said he, with quite a solemn emphasis, "as true as that there moon's a-shining down upon us, I this night saw Nash Caromel. I should know him amid a thousand. And I thought my heart would just ha' leaped out of me."

To hear this strong, matter-of-fact man assert this, with his sturdy frame and his practical common sense, sounded remarkable. Anybody accustomed to see him in his forge, working away at his anvil, would never have believed it of him. Tod laughed. The Squire marched off to the stables with an impatient word. I followed with Dobbs.

"The idea of your believing in ghosts and shadows, Dobbs!"

"Me believe in 'em, Master Johnny! No more I did; I'd have scorned it. Why, do you remember that there stir, sir, about the

ghost that was said to haunt Oxlip Dell? Lots of people went into fits over that, a'most lost their heads; but I laughed at it. No, I never put credit in nothing of the kind; but I have seen Mr. Caromel's ghost to-night."

"Was it in white?"

"Bless your heart, sir, no. He was in a sort o' long-skirted dark cloak that seemed to wrap him well round; and his head, was in something black. It might ha' been a cap; I don't know. And here we are at the stable, so I'll say no more: but I can't ever speak anything truer in my life than I've spoke this, sir."

All this passed. In spite of the blacksmith's superstitious assertion, made in the impulse of terror, there lay on his mind a feeling of shame that he should have betrayed fear to us (or what bordered upon it) in an unguarded moment; and this caused him to be silent to others. So the matter passed off without spreading further.

Several weeks later, it cropped up again. Francis Radcliffe (if the readers of the *Argosy* have not forgotten him, and who had not long before been delivered out of his brother's hands at Sandstone Torr) was passing along at the back of Caromel's Farm, when he saw a

figure that bore an extraordinary resemblance to Nash Caromel. The Squire laughed well when told of it, and Radcliffe laughed too. "But," said he, "had Nash Caromel not been dead, I could have sworn it was he, or his shadow, before any justice of the peace."

His shadow! The same word that Dobbs had used. Francis Radcliffe told this story everywhere, and it caused no little excitement.

"What does this silly rumour mean—about Nash Caromel being seen?" demanded the Squire one day when he met Nave, and condescended to stop to speak to him.

And Nave, hearing the question, turned of a fine blue: the Pater told us so when he came home. Just as though Nave saw the apparition before him then, and was frightened at it.

"The rumour is infamous," he answered, biting his cold lips to keep down his passion. "Infamous and ridiculous both. Emanating from idle fools. I think, sir, as a magistrate, you might order these people before you and punish them."

"Punish people for thinking they see Caromel's ghost!" retorted the Squire. "Bless my heart! What an ignorant man (for a lawyer) you must be! No act has been passed

against seeing ghosts. But I'd like to know what gives rise to the fancy about Caromel."

The rumour did not die away. How could it, when from time to time the thing continued to be seen? It frightened Mary Standish into a fit. Going to Caromel's Farm one night to beg grace for something or other that her ill-doing husband, Jim, then working on the farm, had done or left undone, she came upon a wonderfully thin man standing in the nook by the dairy window, and took him to be the bailiff, who was himself no better than a walking lamp-post. "If you please, sir," she was beginning, thinking to have it out with him instead of Mrs. Caromel, "If you please, sir——"

When, upon looking into his pale, stoney face, she saw the late master. He vanished into air or into the wall, and down fell Mary Standish in a fainting fit. The parish grew uneasy at all this—and wondered what had been done to Nash, or what he had done, that he could not rest.

One night I was coming, with Tod, across from Mrs. Scott's, who lived beyond Hyde Stockhausen's. We took the field way from Church Dykely, as being the shortest route, and that led us through the copse at the back

of Caromel's Farm. It was a very light night, though not moonlight; and we walked on at a good rate, talking of a frightful scrape Sam Scott had got into, and which he was afraid to tell his mother of. All in a moment, just in the middle of the copse, we came upon a man standing amid the trees, his face towards us. Tod turned and I turned; and we both saw Nash Caromel. Now, of course, you will laugh. As the Squire did when we got home (in a white heat) and told him: and he called us a couple of poltroons. But, if ever I saw the face of Nash Caromel, I saw it then; and if ever I saw a figure that might be called a shadow, it was his.

"Fine gentlemen, both of you!" scoffed the Squire. "Clear and sensible! Seen a ghost, have you, and confess to it! Ho, ho! Running through the back copse, you come upon somebody that you must take for an apparition! Ha, ha! Nice young cowards! I'd write an account of it to the Worcester papers if I were you. A ghost, with glaring eyes and a white face! Death's head upon a mopstick, lads! I'd not have wondered at Johnny; but I do wonder at you, Joe," concluded the Squire, smoothing down.

"I am no more afraid of ghosts than you

are, father," quietly answered Joe. "I was not afraid when we saw—what we did see; I can't answer for Johnny. But I do declare, with all my senses (which you are pleased to disparage) about me, that it was the form and face of Nash Caromel, and that 'it' (whatever it might be) seemed to vanish from our sight as we looked."

"Johnny calls it a shadow," mocked the Squire, amiably.

"It looked shadowy," said Tod.

"A tree-trunk, I dare be bound, lads, nothing else," nodded the Squire. And you might as well have tried to make an impression on a post.

III.

September came in: which made it a year since Nash died. And on one of its bright days, when the sun was high, and the blue sky cloudless, Church Dykely had a stir given it in the sight of the mistress of Caromel's Farm. She and her father were in a gig together, driving off on the Worcester road: and it was so very rare a thing to see her abroad now, that folks ran to their windows and doors to stare. Her golden hair, what could be seen of it for her smart blue parasol, shone in the sunlight; but her face looked

white and thin through the black crape veil.

"Just like a woman who gets disturbed o' nights," pronounced Sam Rimmer, thinking of the ghostly presence that was believed to haunt the house.

Before that day's beautiful sun had gone down to light the inhabitants of the other hemisphere, ill-omened news reached Church Dykely. An accident had happened to the horse and gig. It was said that both Nave and his daughter were dreadfully injured; one of them nearly killed. Miss Gwinny, left at home to take care of Caromel's Farm, posted off to the scene of damage.

Holding Caromel's Farm in small respect now, the Squire yet chose to show himself neighbourly; and he got up from his dinner to go there and inquire particulars. "You may come with me, lads, if you like," said he. Tod laughed.

"He is afraid of seeing Caromel," whispered he in my ear, as we took down our hats.

And, whether the Squire was afraid of it or not, he did see him. It was a lovely moonlight night, bright and clear as the day had been. Old Grizzel could not tell us much more of the accident than we had heard before;

except that it was quite true there had been one, and that Miss Gwinny had gone. And, by the way Grizzel inwardly shook and shivered while she spoke, and turned her eyes to all corners in some desperate fear, one might have thought she had been pitched out of a gig herself.

We had left the door—it was the side entrance—when the Squire turned back to put some last query to her. Tod and I went on. The path was narrow, the overhanging trees on either side obscured the moonlight, making it dark. Chancing to glance round, I noticed the Squire, at the other end of the path, coming soberly after us. Suddenly he seemed to halt, to look sideways at the trees, and then he came on with a wild bound.

"Boys! Boys!" cried he, in a semi-whisper, "come on. There's Caromel yonder."

And to see the Pater's face in a steaming consternation, and to watch him rush on to the gate was better than a play. Seen Caromel! It was not so long since he had mocked at us for saying it.

Through the gate went he, bolt into the arms of some unexpected figure, standing there. We peered at it in the uncertain

lights cast by the trees, and made it out to be Dobbs, the blacksmith.

Dobbs, with a big coat on, hiding his shirt sleeves and his leather apron: Dobbs standing as silent as the grave: arms folded, head bent: Dobbs in stockinged feet, without his shoes.

"Dobbs, my good fellow, what on earth do you put yourself in people's way for, standing stock-still like a Chinese image?" gasped the Squire. "Dobbs—why, you have no boots on."

"Hush!" breathed Dobbs, hardly above his breath. "I ask your pardon, Squire. Hush, please! There's something uncanny in this place; some ugly mystery. I mean to find it out if I can, sirs, and this is the third night I've come here on the watch. Hark!"

Sounds, as of a woman's voice weeping and wailing, reached us faintly from somewhere—down beyond the garden trees. The Pater looked regularly flustered.

"Listen!" repeated Dobbs, raising his big hand to entreat for silence. "Yes, Squire; I don't know what the mystery is; but there is something wrong about the place, and I can't sleep o' nights for it. Please hearken, sirs."

The blacksmith was right. Wrong and

mystery, such as the world does not often hear of, lay within Caromel's Farm. Curious mystery; wicked wrong. Leaning our arms on the gate, watching the moonlight flickering on the trees, we listened to Dobbs's whispered revelation. It made the Squire's hair stand on end.

CAROMEL'S FARM.

THE LAST OF THE CAROMELS.

WHEN a house is popularly allowed to be haunted, and its inmates get thin and white and restless, it is not the best place in the world for children: and this was supposed by Church Dykely to be the reason why Mrs. Nash Caromel the Second had never allowed her child to come home since the death of its father. At first it was said that she would not risk having him lest he should catch the fever Nash had died of: but, when the weeks went on, and the months went on, and years (so far as could be seen) were likely to go on, and still the child was kept away, people put it down to the other disagreeable fact.

Anyway, Mrs. Nash Caromel—or Charlotte Nave, as you please—did not have the boy home. Little Dun was kept at his grandfather's, Lawyer Nave; and Miss Harriet Nave took care of him: the other sister,

Gwinny, remaining at Caromel's Farm. Towards the close of spring, the spring which followed the death of Nash, when Dun was about two years old, he caught the whooping-cough and had it badly. In August he was sent for change of air to a farm called the Rill, on the other side of Pershore, Miss Harriet Nave taking the opportunity to go jaunting off elsewhere. The change of air did the child good, and he was getting strong quickly, when one night early in September croup attacked him, and he lay in great danger. News of it was sent to his mother in the morning. It drove her nearly wild with fear, and she set off for the Rill in a gig, her father driving it: as already spoken of. So rare was the sight of her now, for she stuck indoors at Caromel's Farm as a snail sticks to its shell, that no wonder Church Dykely thought it an event, and talked of it all the day.

Mr. Nave and his daughter got to the Rill—which lay across country, somewhere between Pershore and Wyre—in the course of the morning, and found little Dun gasping with his croup, and inhaling steam from a kettle. Moore told us there was nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream; but to Charlotte

Nave, otherwise Caromel, there was nothing sweet at all except this little Dun. He was the light of her existence; the apple of her eye, to put it poetically. She sat down by the bed-side, her pale face (so pale and thin to what it used to be) bent lovingly upon him, and wiping away the tears by stealth that came into her eyes. In the afternoon Dun was better; but the doctor would not say he was out of danger.

"If I could but stay here for the night! I can't bear to leave him," Charlotte snatched an opportunity to say to her father, when their friends, the farmer and his wife, were momentarily occupied.

"But you can't, you know," returned Lawyer Nave. "You must be at home by sunset."

"By sunset? Nay, an hour after that would do."

"No, it will not do. Better be on the safe side."

"It seems *cruel* that I should have to leave him," she exclaimed, with a sob.

"Nonsense, Charlotte! The child will do as well without you as with you. You may see for yourself how much better he is. The farm cannot be left to itself at nights: remember that. We must start in half-an-hour."

No more was said. Nave went to see about the getting ready of the gig; Charlotte, all down in the dumps, stayed with the little lad, and let him pull about as he would her golden hair, and drank her tea by his side. Mr. and Mrs. Smith (good hospitable people, who had stood by Charlotte Nave through good report and ill report, believing no ill of her) pressed her to stay all night, promising, however, that every care should be taken of Duncan, if she did not.

"My little darling must be a good child and keep warm in bed, and when mamma comes in the morning he will be nearly well," breathed Charlotte, showering tears and kisses upon him when the last moment had come. And, with that, she tore herself away.

"Such a pity that you should have to go!" said Mrs. Smith, stepping to the door with her. "I think Gwendolen and old Grizzel might have been left for one night: they'd not have run away, nor the house neither. Come over as soon as you can in the morning, my dear; and see if you can't make arrangements to stay a day or two."

They were starting from the back door, as being the nearest and handiest; Nave, already in the gig, seemed in a rare hurry to be off.

Mr. Smith helped Charlotte up: and away the lawyer drove, across the fold-yard, one of the farm-boys holding the outer gate open for them. The sun, getting down in the west, shone right in their eyes.

"Oh, dear, I have left my parasol!" cried Charlotte, just as they got to the gate. "I must have it: my blue parasol!" And Nave, giving an angry growl to parasols in general, pulled the horse up.

"You need not get out, hindering time!" growled he. "Call out for it. Here, Smith! Mrs. Caromel has forgotten her blue parasol." But the farmer, then nearing the house, did not hear.

"I'll run for it, ma'am," said the lad. And he set off to do so, leaving the gate to itself. Charlotte, who had been rising to get out, looked back to watch him; the lawyer looked back to shout again, in his impatience, to Mr. Smith. Their faces were both turned from the side where the gate was, and they did not see what was about to happen.

The gate, swinging slowly and noiselessly forward, touched the half-turned horse, which had been standing sideways, his head thrown out to see what the stoppage might be about.

Touched him, and startled him. Bounding upwards, he tore forward down the narrow lane on which the gate opened; tried to scale a bank, and pitched the lawyer and Charlotte out of the gig.

The farmer, and as many of his people as could be gathered at the moment, came running down, some of them armed with pitchforks. Nave was groaning as he lay; Charlotte was insensible. Just at first they thought her dead. Both were carried back to the Rill on hurdles, and the doctor was sent for. After which, Mr. Smith started off a man on horseback to tell the ill-news of the accident at Caromel's Farm.

Ill-news. No doubt a bad and distressing accident. But now, see how curiously the "power that shapes our ends" brings things about. But for that accident, the mystery and the wrong being played out at Caromel's Farm might never have had daylight thrown upon it. The accident, like a great many other accidents, must have been sent to this wise and good end. At least, so far as we, poor blind mortals that we all are, down here, might presume to judge.

The horseman, clattering in at a hard pace to Caromel's Farm, delivered to Miss

Gwendolen Nave, and to Grizzel, the old family servant, the tidings he was charged with—improving upon them as a thing of course.

Lawyer Nave, he were groaning awful, all a bleeding, and unable to move a limb. The young lady, she were dead; leastways, looked like it.

With a scream and a cry, Gwendolen gave orders for her own departure. Seeking the bailiff, she bade him drive her over in the tax-cart, there being no second gig.

"Now mind, Grizzel," she said, laying hold of the old woman's arm after flinging on her bonnet and shawl anyhow, "you will lock all the doors as soon as I am gone, and take out the keys. Do you hear?"

"I hear, Miss Gwinny. My will's good to do it: you know that."

"Take care that you *do* do it."

Fine tidings to go flying about Church Dykely in the evening twilight! Lawyer Nave (Nave by name, and knave by nature) half killed, his daughter quite. The news reached us at Dyke Manor; and Squire Todhetley, though holding Caromel's Farm in little estimation, thought it only neighbourly to walk over there and inquire how much was

true, how much not. You remember what happened. That in leaving the farm after interviewing Grizzel, we found ourselves in contact with Dobbs the blacksmith. Dobbs standing stock-still, like a marble pillar, outside the gate under the dark, overhanging trees; Dobbs standing on the watch, in a stealthy, mysterious manner, without his boots.

"But what on earth are you here for, Dobbs?" reiterated the Squire. "Where are your boots?"

And all Dobbs did for answer, was to lay his hand respectfully on the Squire's coat-sleeve to begin with, so as to prevent his running away. Then he entered upon his whispered tale. Leaning our arms upon the low gate, we listened to it, and to the curious sound of weeping and wailing that stole faintly on our ears from amongst the garden trees. The scene altogether looked weird enough in the moonlight, flickering through the rustling leaves.

Dobbs, naturally an unbeliever in ghosts, had grown to think that this ghost, so long talked of, was no ghost at all, but somebody got up to resemble one by Caromel's Farm, for some mysterious purpose of its own. Remembering his attack of fright, and resenting

it excessively, Dobbs determined if possible to unearth the secret: and this was the third night he had come upon the watch.

"But why stand without your boots?" whispered the Squire, who could not get over the shoeless feet.

"That I may make no noise in running to pounce upon him, sir," whispered back Dobbs. "I take 'em off and hide 'em in the copse behind here. They be just at your back, Master Johnny."

"Pounce upon whom?" demanded the Squire. "Can't you speak plainly?"

"That's what I'd like to know," breathed Dobbs. "I feel nearly sure, Squire, that the —the thing looking like Nash Caromel is not Nash Caromel. Nor his ghost, either."

"I never saw two faces more alike, and I have just seen it now," put in the Squire. "At least, as much as a shadow can look like a face."

"Ay," assented Dobbs. "I'm as sure, sir, as I am of my own forge, that it is a likeness got up by Nave to scare us. And I'll *eat* the forge," added Dobbs with emphasis, "if there's not something worse than ghosts at Caromel's Farm—though I can't guess what it is."

"What a villain he must be: and Nave,

too!" cried the Squire, rubbing his red nose, while Tod simply stared at the man. "But, look here, Dobbs—how could any man put on the face of Nash Caromel?"

"I don't know how he does it, Squire, or what he does, but I'm good to find out," returned the blacksmith. "And if—just hark there again, sirs!"

The same faint sounds of wailing, of entreaty in a woman's voice, rose again upon the air. Dobbs, with a gesture to ask for strict silence, went noiselessly down the dark path in his brown woollen stockings, that looked thick enough for boots. Tod, eager for any adventure, stole after him, and I brought up the rear. The Squire remained where he was, and held the gate open, expecting perhaps that we might want to make a rush through it as he had just done.

Two minutes more, and the mystery was solved. Near the house, under the shade of the closely intersecting trees, stood old Grizzel and the figure people had taken to be the ghost of Nash Caromel. It was Grizzel's voice we heard, full of piteous entreaty to him not to do something.

"Just for this night, master, for the love of heaven! Don't do it, just this night that

I'm left in charge! They've trusted me, you see!"

The words seemed to make no impression. Pushing her hands back, the figure was turning impatiently away, when Dobbs seized upon it.

But, in sheer astonishment, or perhaps in terror, Dobbs let go again to step backwards; and the prize might have escaped but for the strong arms of Tod. It was indeed Nash Caromel. Not his ghost. Himself.

Nash Caromel worn to the veriest shadow mortal eyes ever gazed upon. The Squire came up; we all went into the house together, and explanation ensued.

Nash had not died. When the fever, of which it was feared he would die, reached its crisis, he awoke to life, not to death. But, terrified at his position—the warrant, applied for by Henry Tinkle, being out against him—overwhelmed with a sense of shame, he had feigned death as the only chance of escaping disgrace and trouble and punishment. The first thought perhaps was Nave's; indeed there was no doubt of it—or his and his daughter's combined. They wanted to keep the income, you see. Any way, they carried the thought out, and had successfully con-

trived to deceive doctors, undertakers, and the world. Nash, weak as a rat, had got out of bed to watch his own funeral procession wind down the avenue.

And there, in the upper rooms of the house he had since lived until now, old Grizzel sharing the secret. But a grievous complaint, partly brought on by uneasiness of mind, partly inherited from his father, who had died of it, had speedily attacked Nash, one for which there was no cure. It had worn him to a shadow.

He had walked in the garden sometimes. He had come out in the twilight of the evening or at night; he had now and then passed through the gate and crossed over to the thick copse; simply because to live entirely without fresh air, to stay inactive indoors, was intolerable to him. His wife and her sister did their best to prevent it. Nave came in the day time and would blow him up by the hour together; but they could not always keep him in. At last they grew alarmed. For, when they attempted to use force, by locking the doors, he told them that unless he was allowed his way in this, he would declare himself to the world. Life could not have been a bed of roses for any of them.

To look at him, as he sat there to-night by the kitchen fire, his cheeks white and hollow, his sunken eyes encased in dark rims, and his thin lips on the shiver, you'd hardly have given him a week of life. A great pity sat in the blacksmith's face.

"Don't reproach yourself, Dobbs: it's the best thing that could have happened to me," spoke Nash Caromel kindly. "I am not sure but I should have gone out this night and declared myself. Grizzel thought it, and put herself into a whirlwind of fear. Nobody but myself knows the yearning to do it that has been upon me. You won't go and tell it out in the market-place, will you, Dobbs?"

"I'll not tell on't to a single soul, sir," said Dobbs, earnestly, standing straight in his brown stockings. "Nobody shall know on't from me. And I'm as glad as glad can be that you be alive and did not die in that fever."

"We are all safe and sure, Caromel; not a hint shall escape us," spoke the Squire from the midst of his astonishment. "The first thing must be to get Duffham here."

"Duffham can't do any good; things have gone too far with me," said poor Nash. "Once this disorder lays regular hold of a man,

there's no hope for him: you know that, Todhetley."

"Stuff!" said the Pater. "I don't believe it has gone too far, only you've got moped here and think so. We'll have Duffham here at once. You boys can go for him."

"No," dissented Caromel. "Duffham may tell the tale abroad. I'd rather die in peace, if I can."

"Not he. Duffham! Why you ought to know him better. Duffham will be as secret as ourselves. Do you suppose that he, a family doctor, has not many a weighty secret to keep? Come, be off, lads: and, mind, we trust *you*."

Nash Caromel sighed, and said no more. He had been wanting badly enough to see a friend or two, but not to be shown up to the parish. We went out with Dobbs, who rushed into the copse to get his shoes.

This discovery might never have ensued, I take it, had Charlotte Nave and the lawyer not been upset in the gig. They would have stood persistently in his light—perhaps have succeeded in locking him in by force! As it was, we had it all our own way.

"How could you lend yourself to so infamous a deception?" cried the Squire to old Grizzel,

following her into the pantry to ask it, when she returned from bolting the door after us. "I'm not at all sure that you could not be punished for it. It's—it's a conspiracy. And you, of all people, old Grizzel, to forget the honour of the Caromels! Why! you lived with his father!—and with his brother. All these years!"

"And how could I tell again him when I was asked not to?" contended Grizzel, the tears dropping on to a tin saucepan she was rubbing out. "Master Nash was as dear to me as the others were. Could it be me to speak up and say he was not in the coffin, but only old things to make up weight? Could it be me to tell he was alive and hiding up aloft here, and so get him put in prison? No, sir; the good name of the Caromels was much to me, but Master Nash was more."

"Now, come, old woman, where's the use of crying like that? Well, yes; you have been faithful, and it's a great virtue. And—and there's a shilling or two for you."

"Have you been blowing her up?" asked Nash, as the Squire went back to him, and sat down on the other side the wide kitchen hearth, the fire throwing its glow upon the shining bricks, square and red, and upon

Nash Caromel's wan face, in which it was not very difficult to read death. He had put his out-of-door coat off, a long brown garment, and sat in a grey suit. The Squire's belief was that he'd not have minded getting into the fire itself; he sat there shivering and shaking, and seeming to have no warmth left in him. The room was well guarded from outer observation. The shutters were up, and there was not a chink in them.

"I have," said the Squire in answer. "Told her she did not show much regard for the honour of the family—lending herself to such a deception!"

"Poor old Grizzel!" sighed Nash, with a half smile. "She has lived upon thorns, fearing I should be discovered. As to the family honour, Todhetley, the less said about that the better."

"How *could* you do it, Caromel?"

"I don't know," answered Nash with apathy, bringing his face closer to the blaze. "I let it be done, more than did it. All I did, or could do, was just to lie still in my bed. The fever had left me weaker than a child——"

"Did it really turn to typhus?" interrupted the Squire.

"No, it didn't. They said so to scare people away. Weaker than a child I was," continued Nash, "both in mind and body. And when I got stronger—what was done could not be undone. Not that I seek to defend or excuse myself. Don't think that."

"And, in the name of all that's marvellous, what could have put so monstrous an idea into their heads?" demanded the Squire, getting up to pace the kitchen.

"Well, I have always fancied that business at Sandstone Torr did," replied Nash, who had no idea of reticence now, but spoke out as freely as you please. "It had come to light, you know, not long before. Stephen Radcliffe had hidden his brother in the old tower, passing him off to the world as dead; and so, I suppose, it was thought that I could be hidden and passed off as dead."

"But Stephen Radcliffe never got up a mock funeral. His tale was that Frank had died in London. You were bold people. What will Parson Holland say, when he comes to learn that he read the burial service over a box of rubbish?"

"I don't know," was the helpless reiteration of poor Nash. "The trouble and worry of it altogether, the discomforts of my posi-

tion, the constant, never-ceasing dread of discovery have — have been to me what you cannot realise. But for going out of the house at night and striding about in the fresh, free air, I should have become mad. It was a *taste* of freedom. Neither could I always confine myself to the walks of the garden; whether I would or not, my feet would carry me beyond it and into the shaded copse."

"Frightening people that met you!"

"When I heard footsteps approach I hid myself—though not always quite in time. I was more put out at meeting people than they were at meeting me."

"I wonder your keepers here ever let you get out!" cried the Squire, musingly.

"They tried hard to keep me in: and generally succeeded. It was only by fits and starts I gained my way. They were afraid, you see, that I should carry out my threat of disclosing myself but for being yielded to now and then."

But the Squire did not get over the discovery. He strode about the large kitchen, rubbing his face, giving out sundry Bless my hearts! at intervals. The return to life of Charlotte Tinkle had been marvellous enough, but it was nothing to this.

Meanwhile we were on our road to Duffham's. Leaving Dobbs at his own forge, we rushed on, and found the doctor in his little parlour at supper; pickled eels and bread and cheese: the eels in the wide stone jar they were baked in—which was Nomy's way of serving pickled fish.

"Will you sit down and take some?" asked Duffham, pointing to the jar. Out of which he took the pieces with a fork as he wanted them.

"I'd like to, but there's no time for it," answered Tod, eyeing the jar wistfully. Pickled eels are a favourite dish in our parts: and you don't often eat anything as good.

"Look here, Duffham," he went on: "we want you to go with us and see—see somebody: and to undertake not to tell tales out of school. The Squire has answered for it that you will not."

"See who?" asked Duffham, going on with his supper.

"A ghost," said Tod, grimly. "A dead man."

"What good can I do *them?*"

"Well, the man has come to life again. Not for long, though, I should say, judging

by his looks. You are not to go and tell of it, mind."

"Tell what?"

"That he is alive, instead of being, as is supposed, under a gravestone in yonder churchyard. I am not sure but that you went to his funeral."

"Tod's significant tone, half serious, half mocking, attracted Duffham's curiosity more even than the words. But he still went on with his eels.

"Who is it?"

"Nash Caromel. There. Don't fall off in a faint. Caromel has come to life."

Down went Duffham's fork. "Why—what on earth do you mean?"

"It is not a joke," said Tod. "Nash Caromel has been alive all this while, concealed in his house—just as Francis Radcliffe was concealed in the tower. The Squire is with him now—and he is very ill."

Duffham appealed to me. "Is this true, Johnny Ludlow?"

"Yes, sir, it is. We found him out to-night. He looks as if he were dying. Dobbs is sure he is. You never saw anything so like a ghost."

Leaving his eels now, calling out to old

Nomy that she might take away the supper, Duffham came off with us at once. Dobbs ran up as we passed his forge, and went with us to the turning, talking eagerly.

"If you can cure him, Mr. Duffham, sir, I should take it as a great favour, like, showed to myself," spoke the blacksmith. "I'd not have pounced upon him for all the world, to give him pain, in the state he's in. He looks as if he were dying."

They were in the kitchen still, when Grizzel opened the door to us, the fire bigger and hotter than ever. The first thing Duffham did was to order Caromel to bed, and to have a good fire lighted in his room.

But there was no hope for Nash Caromel. The Squire told us so going home that night. Duffham thought about ten days more would see the end of him.

II.

"And how have things gone during my short absence, Grizzel?" demanded Miss Gwinny Nave, alighting from the tax-cart the following morning, upon her return to Caromel's Farm.

"Oh, pretty well," answered Grizzel, who in her heart detested Miss Gwinny and all the Naves. "The master seems weaker. He

have took to his bed, and got a fire in his room."

"When did he do that?"

"He came down last night after you went, Miss Gwinny, and sat over this here kitchen fire for ever so long. Then he went up to bed, and I lighted him a fire and took him up some hot arrowroot with a wine glass o' brandy in it. Shivering with cold, he was."

"And he has not got up this morning?"

"No; and he says he does not mean to get up. 'I've taken to my bed for good, Grizzel,' he says to me this morning when I went in to light the fire again and see what he'd eat for breakfast. And I think he has, Miss Gwinny."

Which information considerably lightened the doubt which was tormenting Miss Nave's mind. She wanted, oh how badly, and *was* wanted, to remain at the Rill, being sorely needed there; but she had not seen her way clear to do it. If Nash was indeed confined to his bed, she might perhaps venture to leave him for a day or two to Grizzel.

But, please don't think old Grizzel mean for keeping in what had taken place: she was only obeying orders. Duffham and the Squire had laid their heads together and then talked to Caromel; and it was agreed that for the

present nothing should be disclosed. They gave their orders to Grizzel, and her master confirmed them.

"And what news have you brought from the Rill, ma'am?" questioned Grizzel, who was making a custard pudding at the kitchen table. "I hope you found things better than you feared."

"They could not well be worse," sighed Miss Gwinny, untying her bonnet. She had not the beauty of Charlotte. Her light complexion was like brick-dust, and her hair was straw-coloured. Not but that she was proud of her hair, wearing it in twists, with one ringlet trailing over the left shoulder. "Your mistress lies unconscious still; it is feared the brain is injured; and papa's leg is broken in two places."

"Alack a-day!" cried Grizzel, lifting her hands in consternation. "Oh, but I am sorry to hear it, Miss Gwendolen! And the pretty little boy?"

Miss Gwendolen shook her head. "The croup came on again last night worse than ever," she said, with a rising sob. "They don't know whether they will save him."

Grizzel brushed away some tears as she began to beat up her eggs. She was a tender-

hearted old thing, and loved little Dun. Miss Nave put aside her bonnet and shawl, and turned to the staircase to pay a visit to Nash. But she looked back to ask a question.

"Then, I am to understand that you had no trouble with the master last night, Grizzel? He did not want to force himself out?"

"The time for that has gone by, ma'am, I think," answered Grizzel, evasively; not daring and not wishing to confess that he had forced himself out, and what the consequences were. "He seems a deal weaker to-day, Miss Gwinny, than I've ever seen him."

And when Miss Gwinny got into Nash's room she found the words true. Weak, inert, fading, there lay poor Nash. With the discovery, all struggle had ceased; and it is well known that to resign oneself to weakness quietly, makes weakness ten times more apparent. One thing struck her greatly: the hollow sound in the voice. Had it come on suddenly? If not, how was it she had never noticed it before? Struck her with a sort of unpleasant chill: for she believed that peculiar hollowness is generally the precursor of death.

"You are feeling worse, Nash, Grizzel says," she observed; and she thought she had never seen him looking half so ill.

"Oh, I am all right, Gwendolen," answered he. "What of Charlotte and the child?"

Sitting down on the edge of the large bed, Gwendolen told him all there was to tell. Her papa would get well in time, though he could not be moved yet awhile; but Charlotte and the child were lying in extreme danger.

"Dear me! dear me!" he said, and began to cry, as Grizzel had begun. When a man is reduced, as Nash was, faint in mind and in body, the tears are apt to lie near the eyes.

"And there's nobody to attend upon them but Mrs. Smith and her maids—two of the stupidest country wenches you ever saw," said Gwendolen. "I did not know how to come away this morning. The child is more than one person's work."

"Why did you come?"

"Because I could not trust you; you know that, Nash. You want to be up to your tricks too often."

"My tricks?"

"Yes. The going out of doors at night. I'm sure it is a dreadful responsibility that's thrown upon me. And all for your own sake!"

"You need no longer fear that—if you call

my going out the responsibility. I shall never get out of this bed again, Gwinny."

"What makes you think so?"

"Look at me," answered Nash. "See if you think it likely. I do not."

She shook her head doubtingly. He certainly did look too ill to stir—but she remembered the trouble there had been with him; the fierce, wild yearning for exit, that could not be controlled.

"Are you not satisfied? Listen, then: I give you my solemn word of honour not to go out of doors; not to attempt to do so. You must go back to Charlotte and the boy."

"I'll see later," decided Gwinny. "I shall stay here till the afternoon, at any rate."

And when the afternoon came she took her departure for the Rill. Convinced by Nash's state that he could not quit his bed, and satisfied at length by his own solemn and repeated assurances that he would not, Gwinny Nave consigned him to the care of Grizzel, and quitted Caromel's Farm.

Which left the field open again, you perceive. And the Squire and Duffham were there that evening as they had been on the previous one.

It was a curious time—the few days that ensued. Gwendolen Nave came over for an hour or two every other day, but otherwise Caromel's Farm was a free house. Her doubts and fears were gone, for Nash grew worse very rapidly; and, though he sat up in his room sometimes, he could hardly have got down stairs though the house were burning—as Grizzel put it. And he seemed so calm, so tranquil, so entirely passive under his affliction, so resigned to his enfeebled state, so averse to make any exertion of any kind, that Miss Gwinny could not have felt much easier had he been in the burial ground where Church Dykely took him to be.

What with his past incarceration, which had endured twelve months, and what with the approach of death, which he had seen looming for pretty nearly half that time, Nash Caromel's conscience had come back to him. It was pricking him in more corners than one. As his love for Charlotte Nave weakened—and it had been going down a long time, for he saw what the Naves were now, and what they had done for him—his love for Charlotte Tinkle came back, and he began to wish he could set wrongs to rights. That never could be done; he had put it out of his power; but

he meant to make some little reparation, opportunity being allowed him.

"I want to make a will, Todhetley," he said one evening to the Squire, as he sat by the fire, dressed, a huge carriage-rug thrown on his knees for warmth. "I wonder if my lawyer could be induced to come to me?"

"Do you mean Nave?" retorted the Squire, who could not for the life of him help having a fling at Caromel once in a way. "He has been your lawyer of late years."

"You know I don't mean Nave; and if I did mean him he could not come," said poor Nash. "I mean our family lawyer, Crow. Since I discarded him for Nave he has turned the cold shoulder upon me. When I've met him in the street at Evesham, he has either passed me with a curt nod or looked another way. I would rather have Crow than anybody, for he'd be true, I know, if he could be induced to come."

"I'll see about it," said the Squire.

"And you'll be executor, won't you, Todhetley? you and Duffham."

"No," said the Squire. "And what sort of a will are you going to make?"

"I should like to be just," sighed Nash. "As just as I know how. As just as I can be

under the unfortunate circumstances I am placed in."

"That you have placed yourself in, Caromel."

"True. I think of it night and day. But she ought to be provided for. And there's the boy!"

"Who ought to be?"

"My second wife."

"I don't say to the contrary. But there is somebody else, who has a greater and prior claim upon you."

"I know. My heart would be good to leave her all. But that would hardly be just. Poor Charlotte, how patient she has been!"

"Ah, you threw off a good woman when you threw her off. And when you made that other infamous will, leaving her name out of it——"

"It was Nave made it," interrupted Nash, as hotly as his wasted condition allowed him to speak. "He got another lawyer to draw it up for look's sake—but he virtually made it. And, Todhetley, I must—I *must* get another one made," he added, getting more and more excited; "and there's no time to be lost. If I die to-night that will would have to stand."

With the morning light the Squire went off to Evesham, driving Bob and Blister, and saw the lawyer, Crow—an old gentleman with a bald head. The two shut themselves up in a private room, and it seemed as if they never meant to come out again.

First of all, old Crow had to recover his astonishment at hearing Nash Caromel was living, and that took him some time; next, he had to get over his disinclination and refusal —to act again for Nash, and that took him longer.

"Mind," said he at last, "if I do consent to act—to see the man and make his will—it will be done out of the respect I bore his father and his brother, and because I don't like to stand in the way of an act of justice. Mrs. Nash Caromel was here yesterday——"

"Mrs. Nash Caromel!" interrupted the Squire, in a puzzle, for his thoughts had run over to Charlotte Nave. Which must have been very foolish, seeing she was in bed with a damaged head.

"I speak of his wife," said the old gentleman, loftily. "I have never called any other woman Mrs. Nash Caromel. Her uncle, Tinkle, of Inkberrow, called about the transfer of some of his funded property, and

she was with him. I respect that young woman, Squire Todhetley."

"Ay, to be sure. So do I. Well, now, you will let me drive you back this afternoon, and you'll take dinner with me, and we'll go to Caromel's Farm afterwards. We never venture there before night; that Miss Gwinny Nave makes her appearance sometimes in the day-time."

"It must be late in the afternoon then," said the lawyer, rather crossly—for he did not enter into the business with a good grace yet.

"All the same to me," acquiesced the Pater, pleased at having got his consent on any terms.

And when the Squire drove in that evening just at the dinner-hour and brought Lawyer Crow with him, we wondered what was agate. Old Jacobson, who had called in, and been invited to stay by the Mater, was as curious as anything over it, and asked the Squire aside, what he was up to, that he must employ Crow instead of his own man.

The will Nash Caromel wished to make was accomplished, signed and sealed, himself and this said Evesham lawyer being alone privy to its contents. Dobbs the black-

smith was fetched in, and he and Grizzel witnessed it.

And, as if Nash Caromel had only lived to make the will, he went galloping on to death at railroad speed directly it was done. A change took place in him the same night. His bell rang for Grizzel, and the old woman thought him dying.

But he rallied a bit the next day: and when the Squire got there in the evening, he was sitting up by the fire dressed. And terribly uneasy.

"I want to see her," he began, before the Squire had time to say, How are you, or How are you not. "I can't die in peace, unless I see her. And it will not be long first now. I am a bit better, but I thought I was dying in the night: has Grizzel told you?"

The Squire nodded in silence. He was struck with the change in Nash.

"Who is it you want to see? Charlotte Tinkle?"

"Ay, you've guessed it. 'Twasn't hard to guess, was it? I want to see her, Todhetley. I know she'd come."

Little doubt of that. Had Nash wanted her to visit him in the midst of a fiery furnace, She'd have rushed into it headlong.

But there were difficulties. Charlotte Tinkle was not one of your strong-minded women who are born without nerves; and to tell her that Nash Caromel was alive, and not dead, might send her into hysterics for a week. Besides that, Harry Tinkle was Nash Caromel's bitter enemy: if he learnt the truth he might be for handing him over, dying or living, to old Jones the constable.

"I don't see how she is to be got here, and that's the truth, Caromel," spoke the Squire, awaking from his reverie. "It's not a thing I should like to undertake.—Here comes Duffham."

"I know what you are thinking of—Harry Tinkle," returned Nash, as Duffham felt his pulse. "When I was supposed to have died, balking him of his revenge, he grew mad with rage. For a month afterwards he abused me to everybody in the most atrocious terms: in public rooms, in ——"

"Who told you that?" interrupted the Squire. "Nave?"

"Nave. I saw no one else to tell me." Duffham laughed.

"Then it was just as false as Nave is. You might have known Harry Tinkle better."

Nash looked up. "False!—was it?"

"Why, of course it was," repeated the Squire. "I say you might have known Harry Tinkle better."

Nash sighed. "Well, I suppose you think he might give me trouble now. But he would hardly care to apprehend a dying man."

"We'll see about it," they said. Duffham undertook this expedition—if you can call it one. He found it easier than he anticipated. That same evening, upon quitting Caromel's farm, Duffham went mooning along, deep in thought, as to how he should make the disclosure to Charlotte, when he overtook her near his home. Her crape veil was thrown back; her face looked pale and quiet in the starlight.

"You are abroad late," said Duffham.

"I went to see old Miss Pinner this afternoon, and stayed tea with her," answered Charlotte. "And now I am going to run home."

"Would you mind coming in for a few minutes, Mrs. Caromel?" he asked, as they reached his door. "I have something to say to you."

"Can you say it another time? It is nine o'clock, and my mother will be wondering."

"No; another time may not do," said

Duffham. "Come in. I won't detain you long."

And being just one of those yielding people that never assert a will of their own, in she went.

Shut up in Duffham's surgery, which was more remote from Nomy's ears than the parlour, Duffham disclosed to her by degrees the truth. Whether he had to get out his sal-volatile over it, or to recover her from fits, we did not hear. One thing was certain: that when Mrs. Nash Caromel re-commenced her walk homewards, she was too bewildered to know whether she went on her feet or her head. By that time on the following evening she would have seen her husband.

At least, such was the programme Duffham carved out. But to that bargain, as he found the next day, there might be two words.

Eleven was striking in the morning by the kitchen clock at Caromel's farm, when Grizzel saw Miss Gwinny driving in. The damaged gig had been mended, and she now drove backwards and forwards herself.

"How's the master?" asked she, when she entered the kitchen.

"Very ill," answered Grizzel. "He won't be with us long, now, ma'am."

And when Miss Gwinny saw Nash, and saw how greatly he was altered in the last two days' she thought as Grizzel did—that death was close at hand. Under these circumstances, she sat down to reflect on what she ought to do: whether to remain herself in the house, or whether to go back to the Rill and report to her father and sister. For the latter had come out of her insensibility; the doctors said there was no permanent injury, and she could soon be removed home if she wished to be.

"What do you think, Grizzel?" she inquired, condescending to ask counsel. "It seems not right to leave him—and you won't like to be left alone, either, at the last. And I don't see that any end will be gained by my hastening back to tell them. They'll know it soon enough: and they cannot come to him."

"As you please, Miss Gwinny," replied Grizzel, trembling lest she should remain and complicate matters, but not daring to urge her departure; Gwinny Nave being given, as a great many more ladies are, to act by the rules of contrary in the matter of advice. "It seems hardly right, though, not to let the mistress know he is dying. And I am glad the child's well: dear little thing!"

Gwinny Nave sat pulling at her one straw

ringlet, her brow knitted in abstraction. Various reflections, suggesting certain unpleasant facts, passed rapidly through her mind. That Nash would not be here many days longer perhaps not many hours, was a grave fact: and then, what of the after necessities that would arise? A sham funeral had gone out of that house not over long ago: but how was the real funeral to go out, and who was to make the arrangements for it? The truth of Nash Caromel's being alive, and of the trick which had been played, would have to be disclosed then. And Mr. Nave was incapacitated; he could no nothing, and her sister could do as little; and it seemed to be all falling upon herself, Gwinny; and who was to know but she might be punished for letting Nash lie and die without calling in a doctor to him?

With every fresh moment of thought, some darker complication presented itself. Miss Gwinny began to see that she had better get away, and leave old Grizzel to it. The case must be laid before her father. He might invent some scheme to avoid exposure: for though Lawyer Nave was deprived for the present of action, his mind was not less keen and fertile than usual.

"I think, Grizzel, that the mistress ought to be told how ill he is," said she at length. "I shall go back to the Rill. Do all you can for the master: I daresay he will rally."

"That he never will," spoke Grizzel on impulse.

"Now don't you be obstinate," returned Miss Gwinny.

Gwendolen Nave drove back to the Rill. Leaving, as she thought, all responsibility upon old Grizzel. And, that evening, the coast being clear again, Charlotte Tinkle, piloted by Duffham, came to Caromel's Farm and had an interview with her once recreant husband. It lasted longer than Duffham had bargained for; every five minutes he felt inclined to go and knock at the door. Her sobs and his dying voice, which seemed to be sobbing too, might be heard by all who chose to listen. At last Duffham went in and said that it must end: the emotion was bad for Nash. She was kneeling before the sofa on which he lay, her tears dropping on his face.

"Good-bye, good-bye, Charlotte," he whispered. "I have never cared for anyone as I cared for you. Believe that. God bless you, my dear—and forgive me!"

And the next to go in was Harry Tinkle—

to clasp Caromel's hand, and to say how little he had needed to fear him. And the next was the Reverend Mr. Holland; Nash had asked for the parson to be sent for.

Grizzel had a surprise the next day. She had just taken some beef-tea up to the master, which Duffham had called out for—for the end was now so near that the doctor had not chosen to defer his visit till dark—when a closed fly drove up, out of which stepped Miss Gwinny and her sister. Old Grizzel dropped the waiter, thinking it must be her mistress's ghost.

But it was Charlotte herself. Upon hearing Gwinny's report, she had insisted upon coming home—and Nave supported her views. That stupid old Grizzel, left to her own devices, might be for getting frightened and call in half the parish. The doctor in attendance at the Rill had said Mrs. Caromel might go home if she had any urgent reason for wishing it—and here she was. And really she seemed tolerably well again; quite herself.

Passing Grizzel with a nod, she went straight up stairs, opened Nash's door, and then—drew back with a scream. For there she saw two strangers. Mr. Duffham was leaning over the bed, trying to feed Nash with

spoonfuls of beef-tea; Parson Holland (who had stayed with Nash all night) sat by the fire. Poor Nash himself lay without motion: the hours were very limited now.

Well, there ensued a commotion. Charlotte Nave went down to blow up Grizzel; and she did it well, in spite of her recent illness. Grizzel answered that she was not to blame; it was not she who had betrayed him: Dobbs the blacksmith and Squire Todhetley had found him out, and the Squire had called in Duffham. Charlotte the Second had to make the best of a bad case; but she did not suspect half the treachery which had been at work.

There is no space to enlarge upon the day. Nash died that night; without having been able to speak a word to Charlotte the Seocnd; he was past that when she came; though he shook hands with her.

And the other funeral, which Miss Nave had foreseen a difficulty over, took place without any difficulty. Unless it might be said that the crowd made one. Nash Caromel dead a second time! Church Dykely had never been astounded like this.

But the one dire act of treachery had to come out yet. Nash Caromel had made a fresh will. Crow the lawyer brought it in his

pocket when he came from Evesham to attend the funeral, and he read it aloud afterwards. Mrs. Nash the Second sat biting her lips as she listened.

Caromel's Farm and everything upon it, every stick and stone possessed by Nash, was directed to be sold without delay. Of the money this should realize, the one half was devised to "my dear wife Charlotte, formerly Charlotte Tinkle;" the other half was to be invested by trustees and settled upon "my child, Duncan Nave." His mother, Charlotte Nave, was to receive a stated portion of the interest for life, or until she should marry again; and that was all the will said about Charlotte the Second.

There's not much more to tell. As soon as might be, the changes were carried out. Before Lawyer Nave's leg was fit to go again, Caromel's Farm had been purchased by the Squire, and Harry Tinkle had taken it of him on a long lease. Just after Harry got into it with his little girl; Mrs. Tinkle died; and Charlotte, well off now, came to live in it with him. The other Charlotte proclaimed herself to be in bad health, and went off to stay at the sea-side. And Nave, when he came out again to rejoice the eyes of Church

Dykely (walking lame), was fit to swallow us up with rage. He considered ladies' parasols an infamous institution, and wished they were all sunk in the sea; especially that particular blue one of Charlotte's which had led to the accident that unlucky afternoon.

It seemed strange that, after all the chances and changes, it should be a Mrs. Nash Caromel (she was always given her true name now) to inhabit Caromel's Farm. She, forgiving and loving, made friends with little Dun for poor Nash's sake, inviting him often to spend the day with her, and picking him choice fruit off the trees.

A DAY IN BRIAR WOOD.

THE GIPSY'S WARNING.

THAT day, and its events, can never go out of my memory. There are epochs in life that lie upon the heart for ever, marking the past like stones placed for retrospect. They may be of pleasure, or they may be of pain; but there they are, in that great store-field locked up within us, to be recalled at will as long as life shall last.

It was in August, and one of the hottest days of that hot month. A brilliant day: the sun shining with never a cloud to soften it, the sky intensely blue. Just the day for a picnic, provided you had shade.

Shade we had. Briar Wood abounds in it. For the towering trees are dark, and their foliage thick. Here and there the wood opens, and you come upon the sweetest little bits of meadow-land scenery that a painter's eye could

desire. Patches of green glade, smooth enough for fairy revels; undulating banks, draped with ferns and fragrant with sweet wild flowers; dells dark, and dim, to roam in and fancy yourself out of the world.

Briar Wood belonged to Sir John Whitney. It was of a good length but narrow, terminating at one end in the tangled coppice which we had dashed through that long-past day when we played at hare and hounds, and poor Charles Van Rheyn had died, in that same coppice, of the running. The other and best end, up where these lonely glades lie sheltered, extends itself nearly to the lands belonging to Vale Farm—if you have not forgotten that place. The wood was a rare resort for poachers and gipsies, as well as picnic parties, and every now and again Sir John would declare that it should be rooted up.

We were staying at Whitney Hall. Miss Deveen was there on a visit (Cattledon included, of course), and Sir John wrote over to invite us for a few days to meet her: the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, I and Tod. And, there we were, enjoying ourselves like anything.

It was Sir John himself who proposed the picnic. He called it a gipsy-party: indeed,

the word "picnic" had hardly come in then, for this happened many a year ago. The weather was so hot indoors that Sir John thought it might be an agreeable change to live a day in the open air; and lie in the shade and look up at the blue sky through the flickering trees. So the cook was told to provide fowls and ham and pigeon pies, with apple puffs, salads, and creams.

"The large carriage and the four-wheeled chaise shall take the ladies," observed Sir John, "and I daresay they can make room for me and the Squire amidst them; it's a short distance, and we shan't mind a little crowding. You young men can walk."

So it was ordained. The carriages started, and we after them, William and Henry Whitney disputing as to which was the best route to take: Bill holding out for that by Goose Brook, Harry for that by the river. It ended in our dividing: I went with Bill his way; the rest of the young Whitneys and Tod the other, with Featherston's nephew; an overgrown young giant of seventeen, about six feet high, who had been told he might come.

Barring the heat, it was a glorious walk; just as it was a glorious day. Passing Goose Brook (a little stream meandering through the

trees, with a rustic bridge across it: though why it should hold that name I never knew), we soon came to the coppice end of the wood.

"Now," said Bill to me, "shall we plunge into the wood at once, and so onwards right through it; or skirt round by the granary?"

"The wood will be the shadiest," I answered.

"And pleasantest. I'm not at all sure, though, Johnny, that I shan't lose my way in it. It has all kinds of bewildering tricks and turnings."

"Never mind if you do. We can find it again."

"We should have been safe to meet some of those Leonards had we gone by the Granary," observed Bill, as we turned into the wood, where just at present the trees were thin, "and they might have been wanting to join us, pushing fellows that they are! I don't like them."

"Who are those Leonards, I wonder? Who were they before they came here?"

"Old Leonard made a mint of money in India, and his sons are spending it for him as fast as they can. One day when he was talking to my father, he hinted that he had taken this remote place, the Granary, and brought

them down here, to get them out of the fast lives they were leading in London. He got afraid, he said."

"Have not the sons any professions, Bill?"

"Don't seem to have. Or anything else that's good—money excepted?"

"What do they do with their time?"

"Anything. Idle it away. Keep dogs; and shoot, and fish, and lounge, and smoke, and—Halloa! look yonder, Johnny!"

Briar Wood had no straight and direct road through it; but plenty of small paths and byways and turnings and windings, that might bring you, by good luck, to landing at last; or might take you unconsciously back whence you came. Emerging from a part, where the trees grew dark and dense and thick, upon one of those delightful glades I spoke of before, we saw what I took to be a small gipsy encampment. A fire of sticks, with a kettle upon it, smoked upon the ground; beside it sat a young woman and child; a few tin wares, tied together, lay in a corner, and some rabbits' skins were stretched out to dry on the branches of trees.

Up started the woman, and came swiftly towards us. A regular gipsy, with the purple-black hair, the yellow skin, and the large soft

gleaming eyes. It was a beautiful young face, but worn and thin and anxious.

"Do you want your fortunes told, my good young gentlemen? I can——"

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Bill. "Go back to your fire. We are only passing through."

"I can read the lines of your hands unerringly, my pretty sirs. I can forewarn you of evil, and prepare you for good."

"Now look you here," cried Bill, turning upon her good-humouredly, as she followed up with a lot of the like stuff, "I can forewarn *you* of it, unless you are content to leave us alone. This wood belongs to Sir John Whitney, as I daresay all your fraternity know, and his keepers wage war against you when they find you are encamped here, and that I am sure you know. Mind your own affairs, and you may stay here in peace, for me: keep on bothering us, and I go straight to Rednal and give him a hint. I am Sir John's son."

He threw her a sixpence, and the woman's face changed as she caught it. The persuasive smile vanished as if by magic, giving place to a look of anxious pain.

"What's the matter?" said he.

"Do you know my husband, sir?" she

asked. "It's more than likely that you do."

"And what if I do?" cried Whitney.

The woman took the words to be an affirmative answer. She drew near, and laid her small brown finger on his coat sleeve.

"Then, if you chance to meet him, sir, persuade him to come back to me, for the love of heaven. I *can* read the future: and for some days past, since we first halted here, I have foreseen that evil is in store for him. He won't believe me; he is not one of *us;* but I scent it in the air, and it comes nearer and nearer; it is drawing very close now. He may listen to you, sir, for we respect Sir John, who is never hard on us as some great owners of land are; and oh, send him back here to me and the child! Better that it should fall on him when by our side than when away from us."

"Why—what do you mean?" cried Whitney, surprised out of the question, and hardly understanding her words or their purport. And he might have laughed outright, as he told me later, but for the dreadful trouble that shone forth from her sad, wild eyes.

"I don't know what I mean: it's hidden from me," she answered, taking the words in a somewhat different light from what he meant

to imply. "I think it may be sudden sickness; or it may be evil trouble: whatever it is, it will end badly."

Whitney nodded to her, and we pursued our way. I had been looking at the little girl, who had drawn shyly up to gaze at us. She was fair as a lily, with a sweet face and eyes blue as the sky.

"What humbugs they are!" exclaimed Whitney, alluding to gipsies and tramps in general. "As to this young woman, I should say she's going off her head!"

"Do you know her husband?"

"Don't know him from Adam. Johnny, I hope that's not a stolen child! Fair as she is, she can't be the woman's: there's nothing of the gipsy in her composition."

"How well the gipsy appears to speak! With quite a refined accent."

"Gipsies often do, I've heard. Let us get on."

What with this adventure, and dawdling, and taking a wrong turn or two, it was past one o'clock when we got in, and they were laying the cloth for dinner. The green, mossy glade, with the sheltering trees around, the banks and the dells, the ferns and wild flowers, made a picture of a retreat on a broiling day.

The table (some boards, brought from the Hall, and laid on trestles) stood in the middle of the grass; and Helen and Anna Whitney, in their green-and-white muslins, were just as busy as bees placing the dishes upon it. Lady Whitney (with a face redder than beetroot) helped them: she liked to be always doing something. Miss Cattledon and the Mater were pacing the dell below, and Miss Deveen sat talking with the Squire and Sir John.

"Have they not got here?" exclaimed William.

"Have who not got here?" retorted Helen.

"Todhetley and the boys."

"Ages ago. They surmised that you two must be lost, stolen, or strayed."

"Then where are they?"

"Making themselves useful. Johnny Ludlow, I wish you'd go after them, and tell them of all things to bring a corkscrew. Nobody can find ours, and we think it is left behind."

"Why, here's the corkscrew, in my pocket," called out Sir John. "Whatever brings it there? And——What's that great thing, moving down to us?"

It was Tod with a wooden stool upon his head, legs upwards. Rednal the gamekeeper

lived close by, and it was arranged that we should borrow chairs, and things, from his cottage.

We sat down to dinner at last—and a downright jolly dinner it was. Plenty of good things to eat; cider, lemonade, and champagne to drink: and everybody talking together, and bursts of laughter.

"Look at Cattledon!" cried Bill in my ear. "She is as merry as the rest of us."

So she was. A whole sea of smiles on her thin face. She wore a grey gown as genteel as herself, bands of black velvet round her pinched-in waist and long throat. Cattledon looked like vinegar in general, it's true; but I don't say she was bad at heart. Even she could be genial to-day, and the rest of us were off our head with jollity, the Squire's face and Sir John's beaming back at one another.

If we had but foreseen how pitifully the day was to end! It makes me think of some verses I once learnt out of a Journal—Chambers's, I believe. They were written by Mrs. Plarr.

"There are twin Genii, who, strong and mighty,
Under their guidance mankind retain;
And the name of the lovely one is Pleasure,
And the name of the loathly one is Pain.

Never divided, where one can enter
Ever the other comes close behind;
And he who in pleasure his thoughts would centre
Surely Pain in the search shall find!

"Alike they are, though in much they differ—
Strong resemblance is 'twixt the twain;
So that sometimes you may question whether
It can be Pleasure you feel, or Pain.
Thus 'tis, that whatever of deep emotion
Stirreth the heart—be it grave or gay
Tears are the Symbol—from feeling's ocean
These are the fountains that rise to-day.

"Should not this teach us calmly to welcome
Pleasure when smiling our hearths beside?
If she be the substance, how dark the shadow;
Close doth it follow, the near allied.
Or if Pain long o'er our threshold hover,
Let us not question but Pleasure nigh
Bideth her time her face to discover,
Rainbow of Hope in a clouded sky."

Yes, it was a good time. To look at us round that dinner table, you'd have said there was nothing but pleasure in the world. Not but that ever and anon the poor young gipsy woman's troubled face and her sad wild eyes, and the warning some subtle instinct seemed to be whispering to her about her husband, would rise between me and the light.

The afternoon was wearing on when I got back to the glade with William Whitney (for

we had all gone strolling about after dinner) and found some of the ladies there. Mrs. Todhetley had gone into Rednal's cottage to talk to his wife, Jessy; Anna was below in the dell; all the rest were in the glade. A clean-looking, stout old lady, in a light cotton gown and white apron, a mob cap with a big border and bow of ribbon in front of it, turned round from talking to them, smiled, and made me a curtsey.

The face seemed familiar to me: but where had I seen it before? Helen Whitney, seeing my puzzled look, spoke up in her free manner.

"Have you no memory, Johnny Ludlow? Don't you remember Mrs. Ness?—and the fortune she told us on the cards?"

It came upon me with a rush. That drizzling Good Friday afternoon at Miss Deveen's, long ago, and Helen smuggling up the old lady from downstairs to tell her fortune. But what brought her here? There seemed to be no connection between Miss Deveen's house in town and Briar Wood in Worcestershire. I could not have been more at sea had I seen a Chinese lady from Pekin. Miss Deveen laughed.

"And yet it is so easy of explanation,

Johnny, so simple and straightforward," she said. "Mrs. Ness chances to be aunt to Rednal's wife, and she is staying down here with them."

Simple it was—as are most other puzzles when you get the clue. The old woman was a great protégée of Miss Deveen's, who had known her through her life of misfortune: but Miss Deveen did not before know of her relationship to Rednal's wife or that she was staying at their cottage. They had been talking of that past afternoon and the fortune-telling in it, when I and Bill came up.

"And what I told you, miss, came true—now didn't it?" cried Mrs. Ness to Helen.

"True! Why, you told me *nothing!*" retorted Helen. "There was nothing in the fortune. You said there was nothing in the cards."

"I remember it," said Mother Ness; "remember it well. The cards showed no husband for you then, young lady; they might tell different now. But they showed some trouble about it, I recollect."

Helen's face fell. There had indeed been trouble. Trouble again and again. Richard Foliott, the false, had brought trouble to her; and so had Charles Leafchild, now lying in

his grave at Worcester: not to speak of poor Slingsby Temple. Helen had got over all those crosses now, and was looking up again. She was of a nature to look up again from any evil that might befal her, short of losing her head off her shoulders. All dinner-time she had been flirting with Featherston's nephew.

This suggestion of Mrs. Ness, "the cards might tell different now," caught hold of her mind. Her colour slightly deepened, her eyes sparkled.

"Have you the cards with you now, Mrs. Ness?"

"Ay, to be sure, young lady. I never come away from home without my cards. They be in the cottage yonder."

"Then I should like my fortune told again."

"Oh, Helen, how can you be so silly!" cried Lady Whitney.

"Silly! Why, mamma, it is good fun. You go and fetch the cards, Mrs. Ness."

"I and Johnny nearly got our fortune told to-day," put in Bill, while Mrs. Ness stood where she was, hardly knowing what to be at. "We came upon a young gipsy woman in the wood, and she wanted to promise us a wife apiece. A little girl was with her that may

have been stolen: she was too fair to be that brown woman's child."

"It must have been the Norths," exclaimed Mrs. Ness. "Was there some tinware by 'em, sir; and some rabbit skins?"

"Yes. Both. The rabbit skins were hanging out to dry."

"Ay, it's the Norths," repeated Mrs. Ness. "Rednal said he saw North yesterday; he guessed they'd lighted their camp fire not far off."

"Who are the Norths. Gipsies?"

"The wife is a gipsy, sir; born and bred. He is a native of these parts, and superior; but he took to an idle wandering life, and married the gipsy girl for her beauty. She was Bertha Lee then."

"Why it is quite a romance," said Miss Deveen, amused.

"And so it is, ma'am. Rednal told me all on't. They tramp the country, selling their tins, and collecting rabbit skins."

"And is the child theirs?" asked Bill.

"Ay, sir, it be. But she don't take after her mother; she's like him, her skin fair as alabaster. You'd not think, Rednal says, that she'd got a drop o' gipsy blood in her veins. North might ha' done well had he

only turned out steady; been just the odds o' what he is—a poor tramp."

"Oh, come, never mind the gipsies," cried Helen, impatiently. "You go and bring the cards, Mrs. Ness."

One can't go in for stilts at a picnic, or for wisdom either; and when Mrs. Ness brought her cards (which might have been cleaner) none of them made any objection. Even Cattledon looked on, grimly tolerant.

"But you can't think there's anything in it —that the cards tell true," cried Lady Whitney to the old woman.

"Ma'am, be sure they do. I believe in 'em from my very heart. And so, I make bold to say, would everybody here believe, if they had read the things upon 'em that I've read, and seen how surely they've come to pass."

They would not contradict her openly; only smiled a little among themselves. Mother Ness was busy with the cards, laying them out for Helen's fortune. I drew near to listen.

"You look just as though you put faith in it," whispered Bill to me.

"I don't put faith in it. I should not like to be so foolish. But, William, what she told Helen before *did* come true."

Well, Helen's "fortune" was told again.

It sounded just as uneventful as the one told that rainy afternoon long ago—for we were now some years older than we were then. Helen Whitney's future, according to the cards, or to Dame Ness's reading of them, would be all plain sailing; smooth and easy, and unmarked alike by events and by care. A most desirable career, some people would think, but Helen looked the picture of desolation.

"And you say I am not to be married!" she exclaimed.

Dame Ness had her head bent over the cards. She shook it without looking up.

"I don't see a ring nowhere, young lady, and that's the blessed truth. There *ain't* one, that's more. There ain't a sign o' one. Neither was there the other time, I remember: that time in London. And so—I take it that there won't never be."

"Then I think you are a very disagreeable, story-telling old woman!" flashed Helen, all candour in her mortification. "Not be married, indeed!"

"Why, my dear, I'd be only too glad to promise you a husband if the cards foretelled it," said Dame Ness, pityingly. "Yours is the best fortune of all, though, if you could

but bring your mind to see it. Husbands is more plague nor profit. I'm sure I had cause to say so by the one that fell to my share, as that there dear good lady knows," pointing to Miss Deveen.

In high dudgeon, Helen pushed the cards together. Mrs. Ness, getting some kind words from the rest of us, curtsied as she went off to the cottage to see about the kettles for our tea.

"You are a nice young lady!" exclaimed Bill. "Showing your temper because the cards don't give you a sweetheart!"

Helen threw her fan at him. "Mind your own business," returned she. And he went away laughing.

"And, my dear, I say the same as William," added Lady Whitney. "One really might think that you were—were *eager* to be married."

"All cock-a-hoop for it," struck in Cattledon: "as the housemaids are."

"And no such great crime, either," returned Helen, defiantly. "Fancy that absurd old thing telling me I never shall be!"

"Helen, my dear, I think the chances are that you will not be married," quietly spoke Miss Deveen.

"Oh, *do* you!"

"Don't be cross, Helen," said her mother. "Our destinies are not in our own hands."

Helen bit her lip, laughed, and recovered her temper. She was like her father; apt to flash out a hot word, but never angry long.

"Now—please, Miss Deveen, *why* do you think I shall not be?" she asked, playfully.

"Because, my dear, you have had three chances, so to say, of marriage, and each time it has been frustrated. In two of the instances by—if we may dare to say it—the interposition of Heaven. The young men died beforehand in an unexpected and unforeseen manner: Charles Leafchild and Mr. Temple——"

"I was never engaged to Mr. Temple," interrupted Helen.

"No; but, by all I hear, you shortly would have been."

Helen gave no answer. She knew perfectly well that she had expected an offer from Slingsby Temple; that his death, as she believed, alone prevented its being made. She'd have said Yes to it, too. Miss Deveen went on.

"We will not give more than an allusion to Captain Foliott; he does not deserve it; but your marriage with him came nearest of all.

It may be said, Helen, without exaggeration, that you have been on the point of marriage twice, and very nearly so a third time. Now, what does this prove?"

"That luck was against me," said Helen, lightly.

"Ay, child: luck, as we call it in this world. I would rather say, Destiny. *God knows best.* Do you wonder that I have never married?" continued Miss Deveen in a less serious tone.

"I never thought about it," answered Helen.

"I know that some people have wondered at it; for I was a girl likely to marry—or it may be better to say, likely to be sought in marriage. I had good looks, good temper, good birth, and a good fortune: and I daresay I was just as willing to be chosen as all young girls are. Yes, I say that all girls possess an innate wish to marry; it is implanted in their nature, comes with their mother's milk. Let their station be high or low, a royal princess, if you will, or the housemaid Jemima Cattledon suggested but now, the same natural instinct lies within each—a wish to be a wife. And no reason, either, why they should not wish it; it's nothing to be ashamed of; and Helen, my dear, I would rather hear a girl

avow it openly, as you do, than pretend to be shocked at its very mention."

Some gleams of sunlight flickered on Miss Deveen's white hair and fine features as she sat under the trees, her bronze-coloured silk gown falling around her in rich folds, and a big amethyst brooch fastening her collar. I began to think how good-looking she must have been when young, and where the eyes of the young men of those days could have been. Lady Whitney, looking like a bundle in her light dress that ill became her, sat near, fanning herself.

"Yes, I do wonder, now I think of it, that you never married," said Helen.

"To tell you the truth, I wonder myself sometimes," replied Miss Deveen, smiling. "I think—I believe—that, putting other advantages aside, I was well calculated to be a wife, and should have made a good one. Not that *that* has anything to do with it; for you see the most incapable of women marry, and who remain incapable to their dying day. I could mention wives at this moment, within the circle of my acquaintance, who are no more fit to be wives than is that three-legged stool Johnny is balancing himself upon; and who in consequence unwittingly keep their

husbands and their homes in a state of perpetual turmoil. I was not one of these, I am sure; but here I am, unmarried still."

"Would you marry now?" asked Helen briskly: and we all burst into a laugh at the question, Miss Deveen's the merriest.

"Marry at sixty! Not if I know it. I have at least twenty years too many for that; some might say thirty. But I don't believe many women give up the idea of marriage before they are forty; and I do not see why they should. No, nor then, either."

"But—why did you not marry, Miss Deveen?"

"Ah, my dear, if you wish for an answer to that question, you must ask it of Heaven. I cannot give one. All I can tell you is, that I did hope to be married, and expected to be married, *waited* to be married; but here you see me in my old age—Miss Deveen."

"Did you—never have a chance of it—an opportunity?" questioned Helen with hesitation.

"I had more than one chance: I had two or three chances, just as you have had. During the time that each 'chance' was passing, if we may give it the term, I thought assuredly I should soon be a wife. But each chance

melted away from this cause or that cause, ending in nothing. And the conclusion I have come to, Helen, for many a year past, is, that God, for some wise purpose of His own, decreed that I should not marry. What we know not here, we shall know hereafter."

Her tone had changed to one of deep reverence. She did not say more for a little time.

"When I look around the world," she at length went on, "and note how many admirable women see their chances of marriage dwindle down one after another, from unexpected and apparently trifling causes, it is impossible not to feel that the finger of God is at work. That——"

"But now, Miss Deveen, we *could* marry if we would—all of us," interrupted Helen. "If we did not have to regard suitability and propriety, and all that, there's not a girl but could go off to church and marry *somebody*."

"If it's only a broomstick," acquiesced Miss Deveen, "or a man no better than one. Yes, Helen, you are right: and it has occasionally been done. But when we fly antagonistically in the teeth of circumstances, bent on following our own resolute path, we take ourselves out of God's hands—and must reap the consequences."

"I—do not—quite understand," slowly spoke Helen.

"Suppose I give you an instance of what I mean, my dear. Some years ago I knew a young lady——"

"Is it *true?* What was her name?"

"Certainly it is true, every detail of it. As to her name—well, I do not see any reason why I should not tell it: her name was Eliza Lake. I knew her family very well indeed. was intimate with her mother. Eliza was the third daughter, and desperately eager to be married. Her chances came. The first offer was eligible; but the two families could not agree about money matters, and it dropped through. The next offer Eliza would not accept—it was from a widower with children, and she sent him to the right-about. The third went on smoothly nearly to the wedding day, and a good and suitable match it would have been, but something occurred then very unpleasant, though I never knew the precise particulars. The bridegroom-to-be got into some trouble or difficulty, he had to quit his country hastily, and the marriage was broken off—was at an end. That was the last offer she had, so far as I knew; and the years went on, Eliza gadding out to parties, and

flirting and coquetting, all in the hope to get a husband. When she was in her thirtieth year, her mother came to me one day in much distress and perplexity. Eliza, she said, was taking the reins into her own hands, purposing to be married in spite of her father, mother, and friends. Mrs. Lake wanted me to talk to Eliza; she thought I might influence her, though they could not; and I took an opportunity of doing so—freely. It is of no use to mince matters when you want to save a girl from ruin. I recalled the past to her memory, saying that I believed, judging by that past, that Heaven did not intend her to marry. I told her all the ill I had heard of the man she was now choosing; also that she had absolutely thrown herself at him, and he had responded for the sake of the little money she possessed; and that if she persisted in marrying him she would assuredly rue it. In language as earnest as I knew how to choose, I laid all this before her."

"And what was her answer to you?"—Helen spoke as if her breath was short.

"Just the reckless answer that a blinded, foolish girl would make. 'Though Heaven and earth were against me, I should marry him, Miss Deveen. I am beyond the control

of parents, brothers, sisters, friends; and I will not die an old maid to please any of you.' Those were the wilful words she used; I have never forgotten them; and the next week she betook herself to church."

"Did the marriage turn out badly?"

"Ay, it did. Could you expect anything else? Poor Eliza supped the cup of sorrow to its dregs: and she brought bitter sorrow and trouble also on her family. *That*, Helen, is what I call taking oneself out of God's hands, and flying determinately in the face of what is right and seemly, and *evidently appointed*."

"You say yourself it is hard not to be married," quoth Helen.

"No, I do not," laughed Miss Deveen. "I say that it appears hard to us when our days of youth are passing, and when we see our companions chosen and ourselves left: but, rely upon it, Helen, as we advance in years, we acquiesce in the decree; many of us learning to be thankful for it."

"And you young people little think what great cause you have to be thankful for it," cried Lady Whitney, all in a heat. "Marriage brings a peck of cares: and nobody knows what anxiety boys and girls entail until they have them."

"Miss Deveen nodded emphatically. "It

is very true. I would not exchange my present lot with that of the best wife in England; believe that, or not, as you will, Helen. Of all the different states this busy earth can produce, a lot such as mine is assuredly the most exempt from trouble. And, my dear, if you are destined never to marry, you have a great deal more cause to be thankful than rebellious."

"The other day, when you were preaching to us, you told us that trouble came for our benefit," grumbled Helen, passing into rebellion forthwith.

"I remember it," assented Miss Deveen, "and very true it is. My heart has sickened before now at witnessing the troubles, apparently unmerited, that some people, whether married or single, have to undergo; and I might have been almost tempted to question the loving-kindness of Heaven, but for remembering that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom."

Anna interrupted the silence that ensued. She came running up with a handful of wild roses and sweetbriar, gathered in the hedge below. Miss Deveen took them when offered to her, saying she thought of all flowers the wild rose was the sweetest.

"How solemn you all look!" cried Anna.

"Don't we!" said Helen. "I have been having a lecture read to me."

"By whom?"

"Everybody here—except Johnny Ludlow. And I am sure I hope *he* was edified. I wonder when tea is going to be ready!"

"Directly, I should say," said Anna: "for here comes Mrs. Ness with the cups and saucers."

I ran forward to help her bring the things. Rednal's trim wife, a neat, active woman with green eyes and a baby in her arms, was following with plates of bread-and-butter and cake, and the news that the kettle was "on the boil." Presently the table was spread; and William, who had come back to us, took up the baby's whistle and blew a blast, prolonged and shrill.

The stragglers heard it, understood it was the signal for their return, and came flocking in. The Squire and Sir John said they had been sitting under the trees and talking: our impression was, they had been sleeping. The young Whitneys appeared in various stages of heat; Tod and Featherston's nephew smelt of smoke.

The first cups of tea had gone round, and

Tod was making for Rednal's cottage with a notice that the bread-and-butter had come to an end, when I saw a delicate little fair-haired face peering at us from amid the trees.

"Halloa!" cried the Squire, catching sight of the face at the same moment. "Who on earth's that?"

"It's the child we saw this morning—the gipsy's child," exclaimed William Whitney. "Here, you little one! Stop! Come here."

He only meant to give her a piece of cake: but the child ran off with a scared look and fleet step, and was lost in the trees. "Senseless little thing!" cried Bill: and sat down to his tea again.

"But what a pretty child it was!" observed the Mater. "She put me in mind of Lena."

"Why, Lena's oceans of years older," said Helen, free with her remarks as usual. "That child, from the glimpse I caught of her, can't be more than five or six."

"She is about seven, miss," struck in Rednal's wife, who had just come up with a fresh supply of tea. "It is nigh upon eight years since young Walter North went off and got married."

"Walter North!" repeated Sir John.

"Who's Walter North? Let me see? The name seems familiar to me."

"Old Walter North was the parish schoolmaster over at Easton, sir. The son turned out wild and unsteady; and at the time his father died he went off and joined the gipsies. They had used to encamp about here more than they do now, as Rednal could tell you, Sir John; and it was said young North was in love with a girl belonging to the tribe—Bertha Lee. Any way, they got married. Right-down beautiful she was—for a gipsy; and so young."

"Then I suppose North and his wife are here now—if that's their child?" remarked Sir John.

"They are here sure enough, sir; somewhere in the wood. Rednal has seen him about this day or two past. Two or three times they'll be here, pestering, during the summer, and stop ten or twelve days. Maybe young North has a hankering after the old spots he was brought up in, and comes to see 'em," suggestively added Rednal's wife; whose tongue ran faster than any other two women's put together. And that's saying something.

"And how does this young North get a

living?" asked Sir John. "By poaching?—and rifling the poultry-yards?"

"Like enough he do, Sir John. Them tramps have mostly light fingers."

"They sell tins—and collect rabbit skins," struck in William. "Johnny Ludlow and I charged the encampment this morning, and nearly got our fortunes told."

Jessy Rednal's chin went up. "They'd better let Rednal catch 'em at their fortune-telling!—it was the wife, I know, sir, did that. When she was but a slip of a girl she'd go up as bold as brass to any gentleman or lady passing, and ask them to cross her hand with silver."

With this parting fling at the gipsies, Rednal's wife ran off to the cottage for another basin of sugar. The heat made us thirsty, and we wanted about a dozen cups of tea apiece.

But now, I don't know why it was, I had rather taken a fancy to this young woman, Bertha North, and did not believe the words "as bold as brass" could be properly applied to her. Gipsy though she was, her face, for good feeling and refinement, was worth ten of Jessy Rednal's. It's true she had followed us, wanting to tell our fortunes, but she might have been hard up for money.

When we had swallowed as much tea as the kettles would produce, and cleared the plates of the eatables, Sir John suggested that it would soon be time to move homewards, as the evening would be coming on. This had the effect of scattering some of us at once. If they did not get us, they could not take us. "Home, indeed! so early as this!" cried Helen, wrathfully—and rushed off with her brother Harry and Featherston's nephew.

I was ever so far down one of the wood paths, looking about, for somehow I had missed them all, when sounds of wailing and crying from a young voice struck my ear. In a minute, that same fair little child came running into view, as if she were flying for her life from some pursuing foe, her sobs wild with terror, her face white as death.

What she said I could not make out, though she made straight up to me and caught my arm; the language seemed strange, the breath gone. But there was no mistaking the motions: she pulled me along with her across the wood, her little arms and eyes frantically imploring.

Something must be amiss, I thought. What was it?

"Is there a mad bull in the way, little one?

And are you making off with me to do battle with him?"

No elucidation from the child: only the sobs, and the words I did not catch. But we were close to the outskirts of the wood now (it was but narrow), and there, beyond the hedge that bordered it, crouched down against the bank, was a man. A fair-faced, good-looking young man, small and slight, and groaning with pain.

No need to wonder who he was: the likeness between him and the child betrayed it. How like they were! even to the expression in the large blue eyes, and the colour of the soft fair hair. The child's face was his own in miniature.

"You are Walter North," I said. "And what's to do?"

His imploring eyes in their pitiful pain looked up to mine, as if he would question how I needed to ask it. Then he pulled his fustian coat aside and pointed to his side. It made me start a step back. The side was steeped in blood.

"Oh, dear, what is it?—what has caused it? An accident?"

"I have been shot," he answered—and I thought his voice sounded ominously weak.

"Shot from over yonder."

Looking across the field in front of us, towards which he pointed, I could see nothing. I mean, nothing likely to have shot him. No men, no guns. Off to the left, partly buried amid its grounds, lay the old house called the Granary; to the right in the distance, Vale Farm. The little child was stretched on the ground, quiet now, her head resting on his right shoulder; it was the left side that was injured. Suddenly he whispered a few words to her; she sprang up with a sob and darted into the wood. The child, as we heard later, had been sent out by her mother to look for her father: it was in seeking for him that she had come upon our tea-party and peeped at us. Later, she found him, fallen where he was now, just after the shot which struck him was fired. In her terror she was flying off for assistance, and met me. The man's hat lay near him, also an old drab-coloured bag, some tin basins, and a Dutch oven.

"Can I move you, to put you easier?" I asked amid his groaning. "Can I do anything in the world to help you?"

"No, no, don't touch me," he said, in a hopeless tone. "I am bleeding to death."

And I thought he was. His cheeks and lips

were getting paler with every minute. The man's diction was as good as mine; and, tramp though he was, many a gentleman has not half as nice a face as his.

"If you don't mind being left, I will run for a doctor—old Featherston."

Before he could answer yes or no, Harry Vale, who must have espied us from their land, came running up.

"Why—what in the world——?" he began. "Is it you, North? What? Shot, you say?"

"From over yonder, sir; and I've got my death-blow: I think I have. Perhaps if Featherston——"

"I'll fetch him," cried Harry Vale. "You stay here with him, Johnny." And he darted away like a lamplighter, his long legs skimming the grass.

I am nothing but a muff; you know that of old. And never did I feel my own deficiencies come home to me as they did then. Anybody else might have known how to stop the bleeding—for of course it ought to be stopped—if only by stuffing a handkerchief into the wound. I did not dare attempt it; I was worse at any kind of surgery than a born imbecile. All in a moment, as I stood there, the young gipsy-woman's words of the

morning flashed into my mind. She had foreseen some ill for him, she said; had scented it in the air. How strange it seemed!

The next to come upon the scene was the Squire, crushing through the brambles when he heard our voices. He and Sir John, in dire wrath at our flight, had come out to look for us and to marshal us back for the start home. I gave him a few whispered words of explanation.

"What!" cried he. "Dying?" and his face went as pale as the man's. "Oh, my poor fellow, I am sorry for this!"

Stooping over him, the Squire pulled the coat aside. The stains were larger now, the flow was greater. North bent his head forward to look, and somehow got his hand wet in the process. Wet and red. He snatched it away with a kind of horror. The sight seemed to bring upon him the conviction that his minutes were numbered. His *minutes*. Which is the last and greatest terror that can seize upon man.

"I'm going before God now, and I'm not fit for it," he cried, a shrieking tone, born of emotion, in his weakcning voice. "Can there be any mercy for me?"

The Squire seemed to feel it—he has said

so since—as one of the most solemn moments of his life He took off his spectacles—a habit of his when much excited—dropped them into his pocket, and clasped his hands together.

"There's mercy with God through the Lord Jesus always," he said, bending over the troubled face. "He pardoned the thief on the Cross. He pardoned all who came to Him. If you are Walter North, as they tell me, you must know all this as well as I do. Lord God have mercy upon this poor dying man, for Christ's sake!"

And perhaps the good lessons that North had learnt in childhood from his mother, for she was a good woman, came back to him then to comfort him. He lifted his own hands towards the skies, and half the terror went out of his face.

Somebody once said, I believe, that by standing stock still in the Strand, and staring at any given point, he could collect a crowd about him in no time. In the thronged thoroughfares of London that's not to be surprised at; but what I'd like to know is this —how is it that people collect in deserts? They *do*, and you must have seen it often. Before many minutes were over we had quite

a levee: Sir John Whitney, William, and Featherston's nephew; three or four labourers from Vale Farm; Harry Vale, who had met Featherston, and outrun him; and one of the tall sons of Colonel Leonard. The latter, a young fellow with lazy limbs, a lazy voice, and supercilious manner, strolled up, smacking a dog-whip.

"What's the row here?" cried he: and William Whitney told him. The man had been shot: by whom or by what means, whether wilfully or accidentally, remained to be discovered.

"Did you do it—or your brothers?" asked Harry Vale of him in a low tone. And Herbert Leonard whirled round to face Vale with a haughty stare.

"What the devil do you mean? What should we want to shoot a tramp for?"

"Any way, you were practising with pistols at your target over yonder this afternoon."

Leonard did not condescend to reply. The words had angered him. By no possibility could a shot, aimed at their target, come in this direction. The dog-whip shook, as if he felt inclined to use it on Harry Vale for his insolent suggestion.

"Such a fuss over a tramp!" cried Leonard

to Sir John, not caring who heard him. "I daresay the fellow was caught thieving, and got served out for his pains."

But he did not well know Sir John—who turned upon him like lightning.

"How dare you say that, young man!—Are you not ashamed to give utterance to such sentiments?"

"Look here!" coolly retorted Leonard.

Catching hold of the bag to shake it, out tumbled a dead hen with ruffled feathers. Sir John looked grave. Leonard held it up.

"I thought so. It is still warm. He has stolen it from some poultry-yard."

I chanced to be standing close to North as Leonard said it, and felt a feeble twitch at my trousers. Poor North was trying to attract my attention; gazing up at me with the most anxious face.

"No," said he, but he was almost too faint to speak now. "No. Tell them, sir, No."

But Harry Vale was already taking up the defence. "You are wrong, Mr. Herbert Leonard. I gave that hen myself to North half an hour ago. Some little lads, my cousins, are at the farm to-day, and one of them accidentally killed the hen. Knowing our people would not care to use it, I called to North,

who chanced to be passing at the time, and told him he might take it if he liked."

A gleam of a smile, checked by a sob, passed over the poor man's face. Things wear a different aspect to us in the hour of death from what they do in lusty life. It may be that North saw then that theft, even of a fowl, *was* theft, and felt glad to be released from the suspicion. Sir John looked as pleased as Punch: one does not like to hear wrong brought home to a dying man.

Herbert Leonard turned off indifferently, strolling back across the field and clacking his whip; and Featherston came pelting up.

The first thing the doctor did, when he had seen North's face, was to take a phial and small glass out of his pocket, and give him something to drink. Next, he made a clear sweep of us all round, and knelt down to examine the wound, just as the poor gipsy wife, fetched by the child, appeared in sight.

"Is there any hope?" whispered the Squire.

"Hope!" whispered back Featherston. "In half an hour it will be over."

"God help him!" prayed the Squire. "God pardon and take him!"

Well, well—that is about all there is to

tell. Poor North died, there as he lay, in the twilight; his wife's arm round his neck, and his little girl feebly clasped to him.

What an end to the bright and pleasant day! Sir John thanked Heaven openly that it was not we who had caused the calamity.

"For *somebody* must have shot him, lads," he observed, "though I daresay it was accidental. And it might have chanced to be one of you—there's no telling: you are not too cautious with your guns."

The "somebody" turned out to be George Leonard. Harry Vale (who had strong suspicions) was right. When they dispersed after their target practising, one of them, George, went towards Briar Wood, his pistol loaded. The thick trees afforded a promising mark, he thought, and he carelessly let off the pistol at them. Whether he saw that he had shot a man was never known; he denied it out and out: didn't know one was there, he protested. A waggoner, passing homewards with his team, had seen him fire the pistol, and came forward to say so; or it might have been a mystery to the end. "Accidental Death," decided the jury at the inquest; but they recommended the supercilious young man (just as indifferent as his brothers) to

take care what he fired at for the future. Mr. George did not take the rebuke kindly.

For these sons had hard, bad natures; and were doing their best to bring their father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

But how strange it seemed altogether! The poor young gipsy-wife's subtle instinct that evil was near!—and that the shot should just have struck *him* instead of spending itself harmlessly upon one of the hundreds of trees! Verily there are things in this world not to be grasped by our limited understandings.

END OF VOL. II.